

Getting Warmer

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Getting Warmer

by [surveycorpsjean](#)

Summary

Loki flirts his way into Stephen's bedroom, silver tongued and seductive, and Stephen is ever so weak to say no.

It's just casual. No strings attached. Zero commitments.

Stephen is totally fine with this.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Of live music and dapper, red-lipped women, Stephen supposes there are worse places to be.

It's typical to ignore the emails. And the calls. And the bow-legged intern that shows up at his door. But Tony is *insistent* he come this time around, so Stephen regretfully agrees.

It's a nice penthouse. The drinks are free and the music is fine, but Stephen isn't an Avenger or a spy or a Norse god, and he *sure as hell* won't be seen with the circle of militants near the balcony – so he crowds himself against the nearest wall and wonders why he even showed up in the first place.

Tony is a nice guy. Really, he is. Stark even comes around to pat him on the shoulder and say, “Hey! Havin’ fun?” To which Stephen only nods his head and lies *Mmhmm*. It's enough of an answer for Tony to flutter off and join the fray, two glasses of wine in each hand and a phone wedged under his chin.

Fun. He's not sure if everyone is having it.

Some, sure. Sam and Bucky and Steve, the giggly trio from hell over at the chocolate fountain. And Thor, retelling some mighty story to the eager ones, Peter and Scott listening with intent.

But there's an elephant in the room, and everyone can feel the weight it brings. He's six feet tall and attacked New York twelve years ago. So, yeah. Thor might be the only one happy to see Loki here.

Loki doesn't seem too excited about being dragged along either. He's at the bar, martini in hand, and has a look that says *speak to me, and I'll stab you with the remains of this glass*. Which is fine. Nobody is tripping over their feet to speak to him anyways, and...Loki seems a bit proud of that.

Stephen is indifferent overall. He didn't fight in New York, so he doesn't care much for the guy either way, (so long as he isn't killing innocents or blowing up galas). But he's a bit fun to watch – tall and skinny, black suit tailored to his body like a second skin. He's manipulating the mood of the room, and is all the smugger for it.

Stephen looks away, to his shoes. He fiddles with his tie, and sets down his drink on the lip of a table. He's hot. Miserable. There's a scratch under his skin. It's starting to become a familiar burn.

A sorcerer supreme doesn't really get vacation days – and that's to be expected. But it's been a long fucking week and a long fucking month, and Stephen needs to meditate for the next six years before he's *anywhere* near ready to handle the amount of noise in this room. He's not usually so explosive. But his patience is thin, and he's still not sure why he's here.

There's loud laughter over by the couch. Everyone is slowly congregating to the center of the room; it takes most of the excitement out of people watching. So Stephen settles for his free chardonnay, and turns to the hall so he can open a portal without causing a stir.

“Too much excitement?”

Stephen stops mid step. He turns over to Loki, who's now leaning up against the wall like he's

been there the whole time. Cool as a cucumber.

“I’ve had my share of fun for the week,” Stephen says. He plugs his hands in his pockets, and turns stiff.

Loki smiles, but it’s not snakelike.

“Well I’d say so. Rampant Zorzamites look so much larger in your little Midguardian streets.”

Stephen lifts a brow. “You had them on Asgard?”

“Such ugly parasites,” Loki scrunches his nose. “You’re lucky I coined a pesticide so quickly.”

Unfortunately, he’s right. New Jersey would be neck high in soul-sucking space insects if it weren’t for Loki.

Stephen leans back up against the wall, curious that Loki is bothering to make conversation with him at all. It might be worth sticking around for.

“I’m still trying to figure out the catch.”

Loki rolls his eyes, “Ugh, I do hate repeating myself. I have no interest in conquering Earth now that Thanos is dead.”

“Yeah. You haven’t explained that one either.”

“Perhaps that is none of your business,” Loki says, and shifts a little closer.

“If it involves you, it becomes my business.” Stephen leans towards him, to speak over the noise. “Why the change of heart?”

“As of yet, Thor still needs me,” Loki hums. “It’s also none of your concern. I’ll keep my promise.” He bats his eyelashes and smiles, “I will have your trust in time.”

The noise of the room is centered, but Stephen doesn’t hear it anyways. Loki is staring at him, hair brushed and straightened to his shoulders, top button undone, face pale and beautiful -- and it takes a moment to realize what’s going on.

“Why are you flirting with me.”

Stephen says it, more than asks. Impatient.

Loki shrugs a shoulder, and stares at Stephen straight through. They’re close enough that Stephen can tell he’s wearing cologne.

“Various reasons.”

“I thought you hated me.”

“Still do,” Loki says. “A bit differently, now.”

Stephen raises an eyebrow, but his face doesn’t change otherwise. Loki is a master of manipulation, and Stephen isn’t an idiot.

“There’s nothing to gain from seducing me.” Stephen turns back to walk through the hall. “Go play with someone else.”

Loki follows him, two quick footsteps, before Stephen is grabbed by the wrist and pressed up against the hallway wall.

“Oh, I have many things to gain,” Loki grins. He looks Stephen up, down, and says, “You’re a bit sexy, aren’t you?”

Stephen goes hot. Loki’s eyes are sharp and his tongue moreso, and Stephen hates that Loki is very, very, very much his type in every horrible way.

There’s a reason Stephen stopped dating.

Stephen twists out of his grip by the wrist, grabs Loki by the lapel and slams him back up against the wall. This time Loki breathes in and shudders, and it’s just too genuine to be an act.

And yet, there must be a catch.

Stephen crowds him. He’s not in the mood to be toyed with.

“What’s your game?”

“None,” Loki says, without a tick of a lie. “It’s lonely and tiresome on our little island, and none of the Rebels catch my fancy.”

“And I do?”

“God yes,” Loki grins. He brings a finely manicured hand up to the crook of Stephen’s arm. “Didn’t I say I’d do unspeakable things to you?”

Stephen lowers his gaze. “If I remember right, you followed that up with an attempt to shank me.”

“They don’t always go hand in hand,” Loki drawls, like a purr. His lips lay bored but his eyes are on fire, crackling with a tease, with a mockery that says *just do it, you know you want to*.

He does. Stephen steps back.

“Go back to your brother.”

“Don’t pretend to grow a moral backbone,” Loki growls. He follows Stephen, a step forwards, and his body shifts in an instance. Hair longer, hips fuller, a subtle change into the body of a woman. Her smile is sultry, “I can be whatever you want, baby.”

Fine. Stephen can play this game too.

He leans in close. Presses his large hands to Loki’s waist, and brings his face towards hers.

“You are seriously misguided if you think I’d want you as anything other than a man.”

Loki shivers back into a male body. He falls back into the wall, just to watch Stephen lean with him. Everything about his posture says *eat me, eat me*.

“So you do want me.”

Yes. Bad idea.

“We – we are *not* doing this.”

“Only one night,” Loki says. “Just tonight.”

Stephen stares him down. He’s so torn, straight split down the seams. Hot and trembling. Ticking and ticking – an eternal bomb of stress and anger and grief and bone-deep exhaustion. Every shred of his intuition says *it’s a trick, it’s a trick*. It probably is.

Loki runs a hand up his side, and under the back of his dress shirt.

It’s a trick.

Does Stephen care?

Loki dramatically sighs, “Oh, it’s not as if I’m asking for *commitment*.” He stops to smile, “I just assumed you were the kind of man to fuck me six ways to Tuesday.” He shrugs, “But if not…”

Damnit.

The air crackles between them. Stephen’s tongue goes heavy in his mouth. He drops his tone unintentionally.

“Know this. You can’t fool me. No spell. No sorcery. There’s nothing you can do that will slip past me.”

“Good,” Loki says, and leans in to kiss him. Stephen turns his head, and Loki misses, cheeks rubbing together.

“Loki-”

“Oh come *on!*” Loki snaps, and grips hard into Stephen’s belt. He yanks, forcing their hips together, Loki’s body smacking back into the wall with a low thud. “You’re really going to tease me now?”

He’s hard. Heavy, real. Tangible, against Stephen’s thigh.

“You’re serious.” Stephen presses a hand against the wall to steady himself.

Loki rolls his eyes so hard they turn white entirely. He opens his mouth, and closes it with thought. He then grins, this time *very* snakelike, and rocks up into Stephen’s thigh. Oh Christ. Stephen’s hand shakes against the wall with restraint. Loki’s voice trills.

“Surely. You really think I was going to let you brood against that wall *all* night?

Downright *delicious* in a navy three piece?” His hand runs up Stephen’s chest, over the buttons of the vest, fabric rustling along the way. “You really thought you could slick back your hair and play with your little cufflinks and think I *wouldn’t* gobble you whole?”

Loki turns his head to press one, long kiss along the heat of Stephen’s neck, and Stephen decides to forget all intuition.

Loki looks at him, smug as fucking ever – like he knows he’s going to get exactly what he wants. That’s okay. Stephen may not be a god, but he knows how to do *this*.

Stephen jerks up his knee, and when Loki shudders back and gasps, Stephen uses the motion to kiss him.

It’s not cute. It’s slick and quick and so rough their teeth click.

Loki grabs into his suit jacket, grip strong. Stephen doesn't have much height on him, but he uses his leverage to kiss stronger.

"Ohh, I knew I sensed a troubled past! Come on—" Loki seethes against his lips, "Treat me soft and I'll gut you myself."

Stephen is going to bite that *tongue* out of him. He does just so.

Loki moans *loud*, and Stephen remembers there's a room full of colleagues next door, so he opens a portal behind Loki's back, and they fall into his bed at the sanctum.

"Convenient."

"Take off your clothes."

It's fast. It's rough. Blurred hands on thighs and hair and teeth in skin. Clothes phase away, and common sense goes with it. Loki talks and talks and talks. Stephen shoves his fingers in his mouth, and then he's talking no more.

It's too fast. It's too rough. They don't care.

Stephen takes him on his knees. Palms white knuckled in the sheets, alien strength tearing holes in the cotton. Stephen uses the headboard for leverage. Bites so far down Loki's spine, that he drools into the pillows. The bedframe slams and slams and thank goodness the sanctum is empty, because Stephen holds Loki down by the back of his neck, and Loki screams when he comes.

They dent a solid hole in the wall. It's easily reversable.

Loki's neck is red-rimmed and purple, lips swollen, black hair tangled behind pale ears. His eyes are wet, like he's been crying. But he's smiling, rolled back in the sheets and content like a stretched out cat.

Stephen knows there are fingerprint sized bruises in the hooks of his shoulder blades. It's a future problem. His head is heavy, limbs filled with cement, and he's so *blissfully* relaxed that he can't really bring himself to care when Loki sits up, says, "Not bad," and rolls out of the bed, and into the floor.

Stephen peeks over the edge.

He's gone.

The next few weeks carry on like usual. He narrowly stops an interdimensional squid from swallowing their universe. Nothing too out of the ordinary.

Well, Stephen sure as fuck feels better, that's for sure. Unfortunately, a one-night stand will have to go down as the best sex he's ever had. Because. That was definitely the best sex he's ever had.

It's the kind that stays with you afterwards. Where you zone out and think about the ache in the marrows of your bones. And the roots of your hair. And the hooks of your shoulderblades.

Stephen is surprisingly at ease with the brevity of it all. No strings attached, no drama, no added high-fructose corn syrup. Stephen sees Loki at Avengers HQ, and he's just as moody and impatient as always. Pointing out the obvious. Complaining that he's even there.

It worked out fine. Stephen doesn't feel like a pent up jack-in-the-box, and Loki got to hide the bruises on his neck for a few days. And they lived happily ever after.

Stephen comes home to a woman in his bed.

A tall, lean, dark-haired woman with green fingertips and razor-blue eyes. Oh. And naked.

Stephen leans up against the doorway, and crosses his arms.

"Loki."

"You took awfully long," She says, stretched out and bored, slender wrists drawn up above her hair. She parts her legs, feigning laziness, and Stephen has a hard time looking away. "What could you possibly be wasting your time with? You sure as hell aren't dusting the shelves."

Stephen gives a flat look.

"A one night stand, huh?"

"Oh, baby. That's before you made me come out of my fucking ears," She laughs, and sits up. Stephen leans up off the door frame, and steps into the room.

"Shift back."

He does.

"I didn't think you were truly gay," Loki smiles. He's gorgeous and a pain in the ass. But still beautiful. In a way you know he shouldn't be. A snake in the grass. A poison apple. The raw desperation from that night at the party comes barreling back like a car crash.

Stephen flicks his wrist and shuts the door behind him.

"I'm not. I'd ask why you're here, but I think I already know."

"Don't pretend I was the only one who found our situation beneficial." Loki says, blatant, "It was good sex."

"It was good sex," Stephen repeats.

Loki pulls his hair over one, spotless shoulder. His hips are less curvy, more angular as a man; his neck is delectable and the fire in his soul rivals Stephen's own. A horrible, horrible yin to his yang.

“So come tie me up or suck me off,” Loki drawls. “Either or, tick tock.”

Stephen senses the challenge in his voice. He narrows his eyes.

They shouldn't do this. But who is Stephen to look a gift horse in the mouth? To say no to something he already wants? Good sex with no consequence?

Stephen isn't that strong.

“On your knees.”

Loki stares. Lifts an eyebrow, like, *really*?

Stephen steps to the foot of the bed.

“We have an earth saying. My way or the highway.”

On your knees.

Loki sits back on his heels, eyes a silent hellfire. Stephen smiles.

“That's good.” He begins to unwrap the fabric from his arms, bit by bit. “You'll sit there and wait,” he says.

“How long?” Loki snaps.

“However long I say.”

Stephen undoes his belt. He hangs it on the wall-hook. His obi unwraps at the neck, slipping off his arms after unhooking the clasps. He folds it up nice and neat, and sticks it in his top dresser drawer. His boots take a moment to unwrap. He sets them in the bottom closet rack. The socks are pulled to the hamper. The undershirt goes with it.

Loki makes a frustrated noise. Stephen eyes him once, before disappearing into the bathroom. He washes his face and his hands, and watches them tremble. He returns to Loki, who has his hands on his thighs, eyes glaring bullet holes through Stephen's forehead.

“We were in a rush that night,” Stephen digs into a second drawer without looking. “Maybe I should take my time with you.”

“Maybe you should learn some stamina.”

Stephen sends him on his back with a flick of his hand. Loki fires back a green blast, but Stephen counters it with another spell.

“Nice try,” he smiles, and pins Loki to his back, legs spread under his knees as he climbs on the bed. “I'm going to teach you patience.”

“You can fucking *try*,” Loki spits, and sits up to hook an arm around Stephen's throat, and swallow his tongue along his own.

It's a mean kiss, so Stephen kisses back meaner. Takes the bruising, runs his tongue along the tops of his teeth and forces spit down Loki's chin. Loki arches his back off the bed and moans. Stephen nearly topples with him.

Loki wiggles and squirms – ever so damn clever. He rakes his hands down Stephen's chest, claws

muscle and drags his nails, like he knows Stephen will break out in goosebumps and shiver. He digs into the knobs of Stephen's spine hard enough to bubble blood. Stephen whispers a spell against his lips, desperately trying to avoid his own arousal.

His fingers slick, and he runs a thumb down the base of Loki's cock, humming when he gasps from it. They're not so different, those Asgardian gods. Just as sensitive as us mortals.

"Forgive me," Stephen bites, dragging Loki's lower lip between his teeth, and letting it slip. "My hands aren't as strong as they used to be." He promptly shoves three, unprecedented fingers between Loki's legs, and sits back on his heels to watch Loki heave up and thrash in the sheets.

"Gods you're – *fucking* annoying," Loki growls. "Just fuck me."

Stephen focuses his energy into steadying his hands. It's not a noble use of his power, but it's enough to draw back and stretch them in – and the look on Loki's face is priceless.

"Not a chance," Stephen says, and leans down to tongue into the slit of his cock. He hasn't sucked a dick since college. It's like riding a bike, probably. He bobs his head and – hm, yeah it is. He slips back and mumbles, "You're tense. Relax."

"*Harder!*—You heathen, you imbecilic, you beautiful—" Stephen fingers him at a steady pace, and Loki bites off in a groan.

He's wriggling too much, pushing back down on his digits, forcing his hips up and pulling at the sheets. Stephen uses his free arm to push hard into Loki's hips. He snarls, "Sit *still* – " and Loki goes slack in the sheets.

The instant obedience is sexier than Stephen expected.

"That's it," he hums. "That's good."

Loki bites his fist and shivers. Genuine, eyes squeezing shut. Pale arms breaking out in goosebumps. Soft ribs sucking in air, his stomach a tight swoop from his chest.

Stephen's gut sinks to his fucking cock, and the self-righteous patience bleeds out of him like a popped water balloon.

He has Loki on his stomach in seconds, hand secured between his waist and the bed. They're spread out flat, and Loki fucking *preens* when Stephen jerks his free hand between his legs, and shoves in straight home. He'd be careful with anyone else. Anyone but a machoistic god. (Or not).

"Oh fuck, oh fuck –" Loki curses, elated. "Yes! – Oh, I've *dreamed*, Strange, dreamed – I couldn't walk straight, w-wobbled around the island and slept for days, yes *days* --"

"You make poor executive decisions," Stephen says breathless, pulling back his hips to slam back in, Loki being dragged up the bed with it. "Choosing the disabled guy to fuck the lights out of you."

"The two are hardly correlated." Loki groans. He turns his head so Stephen can bite beneath his throat. "What am I, a Midgardian? Put your *back* into it--"

"Shut up, just shut *up*."

Loki's nails rip the mattress when he comes. Stephen fucks him until he's begging him to stop – and then fucks him more until he threatens to kill him if he does. Stephen's tongue gets caught

behind his teeth, and his eyes roll and he has to press a hand to Loki's back to keep himself from collapsing altogether.

“What're you stopping for?!” Loki rolls on one shoulder to feel back and claw into Stephen's forearm. It stings, and Stephen stops a moan in his throat. Loki hisses, “I'm not done with you yet-“

Alright, fine.

Stephen pulls out, and ever the one to clean up after his own mess; he decides to use his tongue instead.

They dent the wall again.

Loki isn't smiling this time, so Stephen takes it he did his job right.

Instead, Loki has a hand over his eyes, chest heaving like *he's* the one who did all the work. Asshole. Stephen closes his eyes too, just to feel the full-body thrum of the afterglow, and the weird wave of peace wash to his toes. He's sticky and gross and too damn tired to move.

“Let it still stand that I hate you,” Loki says. “And you are nothing more than a means to an end.”

Stephen idly feels for the bite marks down his throat. He hums.

“Let it still stand that it's mutual.”

He opens his eyes again, and Loki is gone.

And so it goes on that way. Stephen wrestles time-demons from outer space. And by the end of the week, Loki will show up in his room to tempt him into ridiculously good marathon sex. Stephen is smart enough to soundproof his room with a charm. Just in case.

Stephen still doesn't like him. He doesn't actually *hate* Loki, but he is high, high up on Stephen's shit list. It's his job to monitor potential threats. Loki is one of those threats.

But, you know. Friends close, enemies closer. Like, really, really close. Like, at least he's here tonguing up the line of Stephen's zipper instead of blowing up a residential block.

Holy hell, Stephen is tired. But he always gets this second wind of energy. Of where he held his tongue, paid his respects, taught students and killed monsters and died over and over until the timeline set right – and now he can hold a hand at the back of Loki's neck and fuck with abandon between his lips, letting go and go and go.

...To an extent.

Loki pops back and scowls.

“You’re a fucking pansy.”

“I’m not actually going to choke you.”

Loki looks up from his knees, unimpressed.

“Choke me? Sorry Daddy~, but you’re giving yourself some inches you don’t have.”

Why you –

Stephen curls two fingers, and spells up the crimson bands from the carpet floor. They wrap around Loki’s wrists, yanking him back, and forcing him still.

“You’re a jackass.”

Loki laughs, but Stephen grabs him by the back of his hair, and suddenly he isn’t laughing anymore.

Stephen isn’t an idiot. Loki likes this. To have control ripped out of his hands. He pushes, and pushes, and talks and talks, hoping Stephen will snap, hoping he’ll just *take*.

Stephen can do that. He gets a grievous amount of satisfaction from knowing exactly what Loki wants. From the knowledge that he could probably make him come untouched, if he wanted to.

And Loki’s a bit of a prick anyways, so if he gags, then good.

Loki rolls his eyes shut and goes slack, swallowing and moaning and holding his own. His lips are stretched and spit slick around his cock, eyelashes wet, and he’s a picture, that’s for sure. The pure gratification on his face yanks Stephen closer to the edge than he was expecting.

“Oh god,” Stephen breathes, slowing a bit in an attempt at self-preservation. “You are – just stunning, when you want to be.”

Loki trembles. Sucks in air through his nose, and squirms.

Stephen slows more, trying to draw it out, trying to ignore the pulse in his thighs and his stomach and the back of his eyes. Loki groans a complaint.

“You’re trying to kill me,” Stephen whispers. He stops to catch his breath. Loki opens his eyes and scowls.

In an instant, Loki breaks the spell around his wrists. He presses a palm flat to Stephen’s navel and snaps, “You *tease* –“ before he slides up high on his knees, and swallows him down fast.

Stephen nearly shouts in surprise, body curling, white hot everything up his neck and in his gut. He curls over him, shaking, and Loki takes and takes like his orgasm *belongs* to him. Smug. The cat that ate the cannery. He licks over his lower lip and smiles.

Stephen breathes through the aftershocks. He waits for his brain to pop back on.

He then curls three fingers, and twists Loki’s wrists behind his back with another spell.

“Disobedient,” Stephen chastises. But it’s light in tone.

Loki licks down the side of his cock. Over his navel. Into his hip. A bite at his thigh. Stephen’s stomach pits.

“I have no master to disobey,” Loki grins.

“We’ll see,” Stephen says, and fingerfucks him until his back goes red with carpet burns.

Nothing bad could come of this. Surely.

Chapter End Notes

anyways u can tear this ship from my cold dead hands

Chapter 2

“I’m pleased you are here,” Thor says.

Stephen prepares himself for the inevitable smack along his back, but he gets a gentle squeeze to the shoulder instead. Thor smiles at him, and it’s hard not to smile back.

“Of course. I’ll help however I can.”

Thor nods, and looks off to the Avengers still filing into the meeting room.

“Midgard became very contested in the years of my absence. I was a fool for leaving.”

Stephen pats his shoulder in return. “There’s some things that can’t be helped.”

“I hope this council is the end of it. The sooner the Earth trusts the Avengers, the sooner we can help those in need once more.”

“You’re a real noble guy,” Stephen crosses his arms. “No one would blame you for prioritizing your own people over ours.”

Thor looks to T’Challa, who has entered the room with an aura of nobility and grace.

“Earth has helped us in a way we cannot repay,” Thor rubs at his eye. The fake one. “And it’s always been an honor to fight along my friends.”

In other words, he’s just a good man.

Like a magnet, Stephen’s eye is drawn back across the room. Loki stands up against the window, far away from everyone else. He has one of those 99 cent Walmart lollipops in his mouth, and the way he’s licking around it is downright wicked. Tongue pink from the cherry, lips stained red. He’s obviously doing it just to edge Stephen on, knowing he would be here today.

Loki gives him a bored look, and Stephen glares back.

Thor catches his eye, so Stephen covers quickly, “Must be a real pain dragging your brother along everywhere you go.”

“Not everywhere,” Thor smiles. “But I always know where Loki is.”

Stephen swallows. He clears his throat and nods.

“That’s good.”

Thor’s smile stretches, and he barks a laugh and – oh, there’s the smack between the shoulders. Stephen coughs.

“Oh wizard! Do not think I am that big a fool. Of course I know what you two are up to.” He laughs more, “Did you really think I knew not where he runs to every fortnight?”

Oh Jesus.

Stephen feels his face go red, so he coughs a bit more, until he can catch his breath. He

immediately fights the urge to astral project into the sun.

He manages, slowly.

“Ah, I see.”

Thor picks at the threads of his cape, looking at the floor before looking at Stephen.

“I appreciate you spending time with him. Loki has always had few friends.”

Stephen blinks.

“Um...really?”

“He says the studying has proved beneficial. He mourns the loss of the library on Asgard. It is kind of you to let him browse your texts. I do hope he’s no trouble.”

Stephen blinks again.

“Ohh.”

That *bitch*.

“Yes, of course,” Stephen replies. He catches Loki’s eye over Thor’s shoulder, and mentally visions a million ways to kill him. Loki licks a long line up that lollipop. Stephen subtly snaps his fingers, and shoves it in Loki’s mouth far enough to gag. Loki pulls it out and hacks, turning to politely cover his mouth with his hand.

Stephen looks back to Thor and smiles, “He’s not a bother at all. He shares valuable knowledge about Asgard. I don’t mind having him around.” And the Emmy goes to.

Tony’s voice speaks up above the noise of the room. “Okay, is everyone here? Head count?” The room starts to quiet down. Tony makes finger-guns. “Okay, cool – take it away Cap.”

“Please take a seat,” Steve says at military rest. “We’ve called this meeting to discuss the future of the Avengers. We’re hoping for a calm, open-minded discussion, so let’s stay respectful.”

Stephen looks back to Thor, but he’s already pulling out a seat next to Banner. Stephen grabs a chair near the end of the table. Loki pulls out the chair next to his.

Stephen narrows his eyes, and Loki smiles innocently.

“Alright, I’ll go first,” Tony says, sitting at the lip of the table. “Steve and I want to co-head this thing. But if anyone else wants leadership duties we can like, hold a vote or something. I mean, if you want to run this shit show, all the power to you.”

“Did you not try to kill each other?” T’Challa points. “How can we trust you two to work as a team?”

Steve tenses. Tony waves around his hand.

“Listen, we’ve worked past that. We won’t get anywhere by bringing up old beef-“

“That’s why we’re doing this in the first place,” Steve starts, and goes on about teamwork or something, so Stephen tunes him out immediately.

In all honesty, Stephen showed up because Tony asked him nicely. He's not convinced on joining a boyband with a troubled past – but he likes to be in-the-know, so he's here. Loki is bored already, arms folded, slouched back in the chair.

Stephen leans over and mumbles to Loki among the talking.

“I spoke with your brother.”

Loki's lip twitches, but his face doesn't change otherwise.

“I noticed.”

“Studying, huh?”

Loki sighs, and whispers, “Do you really want him to know that you're rawing me half-dead every other week?”

Stephen scrunches up his face. Loki grins.

“I thought so.”

Stephen leans back over, and tries to listen in.

“I think we'd be more efficient if we had multiple locations.”

“Well uh, that's a whole other conversation, right?”

“I don't want to move.”

“Yeah, me neither.”

“I live here, so uh, I could – “

“The Bifrost allows me to travel anywhere in the universe. Headquarter locations are irrelevant to me.”

“*Stop*, that's a future problem. We can't expand until we start showing a statistical decrease in crime *here* – “

Stephen lets out a breath, and resists the urge to slouch in his chair as well. It's all a bit petty. They're worrying about common villains, while Stephen is over here trying to ensure their reality doesn't split at the seams. Like, daily.

“Doctor Strange?”

He looks up, “Hm?”

Steve is looking right at him, “I know you've made it clear that you don't want to make any commitments. But your portal abilities would be really useful in certain cross-world circumstances.”

“I'm willing to assist the initiative where I can,” Stephen nods. “I just don't-“

He stops, and swallows. A hand has casually slipped onto his thigh. Not anything pressing, but a casual thing, black nails playing with the inseam on his dress pants.

Stephen continues, straight faced. "I don't want to be public."

"Hey, I can cover any of that," Tony waves. "Media is my game. As far as they know, you got in a car accident and disappeared off the face of the earth six years ago."

Stephen gives him a half smile, "Then you can put me on the mailing list."

There's a couple laughs, and Tony grins at him and nods.

Loki's hand dips further up his thigh. Stephen catches his wrist before he can reach the base of his zipper. He looks over without moving his head, eyes wide saying, *what the fuck are you doing?*

"And what do they think of me?" Loki asks, out loud.

The room goes silent, and the attention turns to him. Stephen mentally curses.

Tony blinks. "What?"

"Your *media*."

"They think you're dead," Natasha grits.

"And what if I want to help?" Loki waves around his right hand, and undoes Stephen's button under the table with his left. "You know. Avenge something."

Stephen goes to stop him again, but now the room's eye is on them once more, and it'd be more than a little obvious. He folds his hands on the table, and inhales when his zipper is slowly pulled down.

"Uhhh..." Scott leans a little bit in his chair, and looks around the room before blinking. "Would you do that?"

"Of course we can't let him--"

"He's a valuable sorcerer!" Thor speaks up. "He can save lives."

"And how in the f--"

Steve covers Tony's mouth with his hand, "How are we supposed to trust him?"

"He – he helped save the Asgardians. Uh, I was there," Bruce raises his hand. "And um. We spent a couple months on a ship together. He didn't murder anyone. I think."

Loki grins. He's lazily drawing his fingers over Stephen's underwear, tracing over him, almost begging for him to get hard. He goes to dip his hands under the waistband, but stops. Stephen bites his tongue.

"I'm sorry Bruce. It's not that we can't trust you, but --"

"You're a nice guy." Tony pats his shoulder. "And we can't trust you."

Banner sighs.

Thor looks distraught. "And my word is not--"

"No."

“I will watch him closely.”

“And closely you have, brother,” Loki grins. He digs his palm into Stephen’s cock.

“Tolerating your existence is already enough. But letting you – what, *join* us? This is way, way above our say.”

“Ask the wizard!” Thor suddenly shouts. Everyone looks to him. Stephen has to consciously slow his breathing. Thor continues, “He has spent time with my brother. He knows Loki’s true heart is truly changed.”

Uh, shit. Well um.

Loki palms him. Stephen rubs at his forehead.

“I don’t really know that,” Stephen says. “But. I don’t think he’s out to hurt—” he swallows, “—anyone.”

Loki smiles. “You see? A changed man.”

Nobody looks convinced. But they look to each other, considering.

“We’ll think on it,” Steve says, and changes the subject. Thank god. Stephen is *tenting*, and Loki won’t stop rubbing sweet little circles with his nails. *Fuck*. It’s starting to build up to something, and this is horrible, this is awful, *everyone* is here, and he’s starting to feel heat between his legs. It’s been weeks since Loki last visited, and all the pent-up energy is starting to boil over here, of all places.

He looks to Loki and mouths, *you’re dead*.

Loki pulls back his hand, and with a wave of his fingers, does his trousers back up nicely. Loki sits like a proud little jackass for the rest of the meeting, knowing Stephen has killer blueballs and a complete loss of focus.

“Go,” Stephen pushes him. Loki resists, so Stephen shoves him harder, right through the portal and onto the stairs. “I cannot believe you.”

Loki falls onto the steps. He squirms back around on his butt, and grins.

“Oh, the look on your face! You’re so easily played.”

Stephen grabs him by the throat, and holds him back against the stairs. He’s mad, he’s aroused, he’s *everything*, and Loki is smiling like it was his plan all along.

Fine. If Loki wants him to snap. He’ll snap.

“I’m going to fuck you here,” Stephen says, “and you’re going to take it.”

“Right on your stairs? Kinky I’d say, who knew you had it in you. If last week was anything to go

by I was really starting to think you were a pushover—”

Stephen grabs him by the waist and flips him around. Loki’s head whacks against the step. Both their knees slip on the wood.

His voice drops.

“Don’t speak.”

Loki looks back over his shoulder. One last stare. A challenge. He smiles.

“Finally.”

Stephen’s not really in the mood for a powerplay. So he grips him by the hair, shoves his face back in the steps, and phases away Loki’s clothes. This is going to hurt. But he wants it. He *wants* it to.

“Oh gods—” Loki moans.

“Don’t *speak*—” he tells louder, grips his hair harder, wets two fingers and stretches him open, does it fast and rough and Loki whines through it all. “You plan everything, don’t you?” Stephen twists his fingers despite the pain, and Loki gasps. “Just to rile me up. Why don’t you ask? Why don’t you just *tell* me to pull your hair. Why is it always a game with you?”

Loki is being smart. He’s biting into his fist, knees knocking on the stairs. Stephen rolls his fingers and Loki shoves back, so Stephen wraps his hand in magic, and swats him on the ass.

Loki is shaking. He’s hard. He’s waiting. Stephen lowers his mouth slowly to the back of Loki’s neck and says,

“Tell me if you don’t want this.”

There’s no answer.

So Stephen takes out his fingers, and drags down the zipper of his pants. Loki moans into his hand. Stephen forces his face into the steps.

They don’t kiss. He just *takes*, and it hurts. It hurts their knees and their wrists and their bones. Loki’s nails scratch into the wood, body shoving upwards on each thrust. Stephen bites into his shoulder because he doesn’t trust himself otherwise.

It’s dark. It’s quiet. Loki’s whines reverberate around the room.

His hands scramble for something to hold onto. One hand finds Stephen’s thigh up by his hips, and claws into muscle until there’s real, red blood. Stephen hisses. He fucks him harder.

He’s not going for stamina. Or performance. Or even pleasure. He just *wants*. He wants the itch out from under his skin. He wants to have something – something he can’t have. Something he can’t name. Something that’s under him, but not really. No. Not really.

Stephen’s knees are bruising. Loki tries to sit up, but Stephen cracks his face back down into the stairs. He moans, and its loud, its so *loud*.

It’s not right. Loki biting and biting into the palm of his hand. Stephen tips his forehead into the swell of Loki’s bare spine, and whispers.

“Speak.”

“Please,” he’s begging, speaking. “Stephen please, I have to come, I *have* to—”

“You don’t deserve it,” Stephen says. He wraps a hand around his waist. Clamps tight around the base of his cock. Loki cries.

“Please, *you* – it’s – it’s only you.” Loki squirms, “Only with you! You’re so–“ He gasps, “-so fucking sexy. How – how could I, *mmm!* How could I resist back there?!”

“Manipulative,” he thrusts, “lewd,” he bites, “naughty.”

Loki’s feet slip on the stairs. His body flops and hits on the sharp parts of the steps. His hair is sticking to his face, wet with tears, still pushing back, still digging nails into Stephen’s leg, still *begging*.

“Please!”

He can’t do it.

Stephen pumps him in his hand, quick and steady to match his hips, and Loki’s voice cracks against his free palm. He squeezes around him, crackles with green, wild energy. It’s amazing. It’s everything. His body then sags, and it’s all Stephen can do to keep him up with his free arm.

He follows after, not bothering to hide his voice, not bothering to hide anything. He’s still fully clothed, Loki fully naked, and he fills him up and noses his hair and thinks *how did I get here*.

Stephen is stripped.

Laid bare of this animalistic wave. Breathing and brain-dead. It takes a moment to focus back into the real world.

Loki is still under him. He’s collapsed on the stairs. There’s blood dripping from his wrist where he bit through the skin. A hand-print is cooling on the swell of his ass. His hair is knotted. His face is tear-tracked. He’s beautiful.

Stephen suddenly can’t bare the thought of him disappearing into the floor. He’s afraid to look away. Afraid that Loki will leave.

The sanctum is too quiet now. Too dark.

Loki is wiping at his face. He’s trembling. He’s vulnerable.

Stephen’s heart sinks.

“Come here,” Stephen says. He gently turns Loki on his back, sits on the stair and pulls him into his arms. “Come here.”

Loki turns into him.

“Amazing,” Loki trembles. His tender hands draw up in the back of Stephen’s shirt. Stephen wraps him up tight, and half-pulls him in his lap. A bruised knee braces on the stair next to them.

“You’re okay.”

“It’ll take more than that to hurt me,” Loki half-smiles. But he’s still shaking. So are Stephen’s hands. He’s not sure if it’s the chronic pain, or something else.

Stephen strokes down the back of Loki’s hair. Loki noses into his neck. They’ve never done this. But Stephen suddenly feels the urge to cry, and he’s not sure why.

“Take a shower with me,” he whispers.

Loki runs a hand up to the back of Stephen’s neck. He strokes at his hair. A first.

“I should go.”

He’s still shaking. Stephen feels down his naked side. His body temperature is cool. His skin is sticky.

“We’re a mess.”

“I can’t...” Loki starts, and then stops. He turns his head to avoid Stephen’s eye. “I can’t...do that again.”

“No! No-“ Stephen tucks his hair behind his ear, hand moving beyond his own will. “Just a shower. Real quick.”

Loki snuffs, and wipes at his eyes once more.

“Okay.”

He lost his sling ring somewhere in the scuffle, but they’re capable of walking. It takes a moment to get up the stairs. They’re both a bit bruised and achy, so they’re slow moving to the bathroom.

Stephen slowly peels off his clothes. Loki works at changing the shower temperature.

Stephen pauses, mid-change. Loki is turned around, hand sticking in the spray, and it’s a view Stephen can say he’s seen before. Always fucking him from behind. But he never really looks. Not *really*. Not at the bumps of his spine, and the beauty marks on his shoulders, and the little swell of his ass.

Loki turns back around, “I’m a frost giant. I can’t really tell if this is cold.”

“I’ll be fine,” Stephen says. He strips off the last of his clothes, and sets them on the counter. “Set it to whatever you find comfortable.” Loki nods, but he doesn’t step in the shower until Stephen does.

The water is lukewarm. It’s good enough.

Stephen can finally see the dark bruising on his knees. His hands are aching in pain, now screaming from the misuse of his nerves. The scratches on his thigh are still bleeding. Loki looks a

bit better, for his advanced healing is already kicking in, but his forehead is slightly bruised from slamming into the stairs.

Stephen outstretches an arm. Not demanding, but asking. Loki lightly scrubs at his body in the water, pretending not to see. But he does slowly, subtly steps towards Stephen's side. The spray hits them both, and Stephen lets out a hard breath.

He slips a hand down and over the mark on Loki's ass. He smiles.

"Sorry."

"Apologize again, and I'll kill you." Loki turns a little to try and look at his butt. "I'm a bit proud of this one."

Stephen laughs, and it breaks the tight air between them.

"Proud?"

"I knew you had it in you," Loki grins.

Suddenly, Stephen wants to kiss him. Not – not like *that* but. Just a kiss. For no reason, but except lots.

He turns his head into the water, and lets it rush down his face instead. Stephen looks back down when he feels a hand grab for his own.

"They're hurting," Loki says.

"Always."

Loki frowns. He mumbles something under his breath, and Stephen's hands start to glow green. He jerks a little, but doesn't pull away until Loki has finished the incantation. The pain starts to numb.

"What was that?"

"Abjuration. A healing spell." Loki lifts an eyebrow. "Are you not a doctor?"

"I only know a few. They are... hard to self-perform."

Loki hums, like he knows. Instead he kneads at his hands, and the pain slowly starts to fall away. Stephen finds himself smiling.

"Thank you."

Loki reaches for the soap, and shrugs a shoulder. Stephen is reluctant to wash, but watches Loki instead. Lovely and pale. Full of teeth and a sharp tongue. He's whiplash in a bottle.

Time stands still in here. Water against tile. A dull glow of green and orange magic. Neither really meeting each other's eye, but still standing close.

When the shower is off and the door slides open, Stephen reaches for his towel, and realizes that Loki is already gone.

Chapter 3

He doesn't see Loki for weeks. Stephen almost worries he scared the guy off.

Not with the sex. But with everything that happened after.

Loki is a fickle creature. He's a river you succumb to, not demand of. When it chooses to flow your way, you take what you can before it's gone with the drought again.

Stephen isn't sure what he's missing. He hasn't thought of Christine in years, but he finds himself thinking of her now. The rare days, when he'd let her lay at his side and run her nails down the line of his chest.

He shakes his head of it. There's lots and lots and lots of work to be done.

The Avengers call him in on a Wednesday. Nasty work, that day. More aliens, more destruction; but this time accompanied by a Ravager ship crashing into Long Island. It was pleasant to see the Guardians again; it makes the fight go a little faster.

Thor shows up, sans Loki. Stephen isn't surprised.

Tony invites him back to his place after the conflict. His hands are sore and his back hurts and he's covered in dirt, but it's nothing a little magic can't fix, so he goes.

It's not a party; just chips and sandwiches in his kitchenette, and it's nice. The Guardians are plunking about in his living room, fighting over the remote, but Tony seems unconcerned.

"Dude give it here!"

"No way man, Gamora said we have to take turns."

"But this is boring! Stark has Footlose! We could be watching Footlose!!!!"

"They're probably going to break it," Stephen says, dipping his chip in ranch.

Tony shrugs, "Things are replaceable."

"Even a 90 inch T.V.?"

"Especially," Tony grins. He hardly spares a glance when a decorative sculpture gets knocked over, and crashes into the floor.

"You're surprisingly cool-headed."

"What can I say? I'm a cool guy." Tony crumples up a Jersey Mikes wrapper. "Also it's nice having them around."

Stephen nods. He dips another chip and crunches it in one bite.

"So uh, how are things with Loki?"

Stephen chokes.

“Woah there –“ Tony pats his back. “You alright buddy?”

“Yeah – uh, fine. It’s. Uh.”

Panic.exe

“Thor said Loki comes to visit you for your library.” Tony grins, “But I assume he’s there for a *different* kind of studying.”

“Jesus, Tony.”

“What, am I wrong?”

“No.”

Tony giggles like a kid, “You’re fucking the devil~”

“I am *not*.”

“Okay, then explain the horns.”

Stephen mumbles, “I think they’re supposed to be like a goat...”

“And goats are the devil. Next.” Tony steals a chip off his plate. “Is it casual?”

“Yeah.”

“You don’t sound happy about that.”

Stephen pushes back his bangs and sighs, “It’s – it’s not even casual. It’s just sex.”

“Is that what you want?”

“Why do you care?”

Tony lifts his hands, “Hey, I’m just curious. I, personally, never got the chance to fuck Thor, so, how good *is* god-sex?”

Honestly, Stephen doesn’t know what he wants anymore. And he especially doesn’t feel like thinking about it right now.

“We’re not having this conversation,” Stephen says. He then squints, “We never *had* this conversation.”

“I’m not going to tell anyone, damn. I’m not a nark.”

“Don’t blame me for not trusting you. Last week you told the group chat that Rogers has Iron-Man underwear.”

“Okay, but that was *hilarious*, so, I get a pass.”

He’s learned to appreciate the quiet days. Where the light floods in the Bleeker street window, and

the students are all resting in Kamar-Taj.

Stephen is in the big armchair amongst his library. He's reading about Lich magic, some stuff he knows, but it's a restored copy of a scroll written way back in ancient Egypt. The pages smell like an old book, and it's nice.

The cloak floats nearby. It twitches.

Stephen speaks into the silence of the room.

"Put that down."

A soft scoff echoes. Loki appears, the invisibility spell trickling off of him. He sets a knife relic back on the wall.

"You're certainly no fun."

"I like my hands where they are, thank you." They struggle to turn the page with their insistent trembling, but at least he still has them.

Loki curls his hands behind his back, and smiles. He leans up against a nearby bookcase.

"It's been a while, hasn't it?"

"I thought you ran off," Stephen says idly.

Loki hums. "Not quite. Its nasty business rewriting a government. Thor wants a constitutional monarchy, but that makes him no better than a hood ornament."

"Democracy is a government for the people."

"And the people are fools." Loki plays with a strand of his hair. He twirls it. "I thought you'd be happy to see me."

Stephen is smarter than to respond to that. He flips another page.

Loki grins, like a tigress on the hunt. He combs through his hair, and leans up off the bookshelf.

"Not even a hello? Then maybe I should slip into something a little more comfortable~"

He shifts, his tunic turning into a sheer black nightgown. It's fur rimmed, and conceals very little. Stephen looks up from his book. Then back to his watch.

"It's two p.m."

"You of all people should know time is irrelevant."

Loki slithers his way, and because Stephen is weak, he pushes his book aside.

He does look beautiful. Gown as dark as his hair, body soft and dangerous all wrapped up in a black bow. Stephen uncrosses his legs, and spreads them. Loki crawls right into his lap like he belongs there.

"I'm an *expert* seductress," Loki purrs. His arms lay up and over the back of the couch, wrists dainty, fingers deadly. Black georgette and fur.

Stephen brings his hands to Loki's waist, and secretly loves the way his fingers swallow his ribs.

"No. I'm just a pushover."

"Maybe so." Loki's hands slip back down his chest. He taps at Stephen's collarbone with finality. "At least you're handsome."

This is creeping towards something else. Something a little more playful.

Stephen pulls back Loki's hair with a summoned tie of orange magic. When he brings his hands back to Loki's waist, he's blowing away stray strands of hair with adorable determination.

"What do you want?" Stephen rumbles.

"To ride you."

Loki thumbs along his jaw. Stephen shivers from it.

He doesn't feel a raw desperation, or an itch in his chest, or an animalistic urge to bite and chew and destroy. He's tired and kinda' happy, so he pushes up the gown on Loki's bare thighs and purrs,

"Then do it."

Loki unties the gown, but doesn't remove it completely. He sits up on his knees, just a little – enough to grab Stephen's hand, and lead it between his thighs.

"Feel."

He's wet, and already stretched. Stephen guides in three fingers, and watches them disappear seamlessly. Loki closes his eyes and hums. Stephen feels like he's been punched in the gut.

"Oh my," Stephen says, without filter. "What a good boy."

Loki's face goes red in a way Stephen has never seen. He looks away, satisfied. He waits before saying,

"I'm two-thousand years older than you."

"Time is irrelevant." Stephen draws out his fingers. He wipes them on Loki's thigh, and the lube glistens against his skin, all pretty in the sun.

Loki runs one finger down Stephen's chest, before tapping his sternum, and popping the shirt off. It folds itself on the coffee table. He undoes Stephen's jeans manually, the button then the zipper, then yanking at the elastic of his underwear.

He's half-hard, so Loki kisses him. Strong, like usual, but a little more tender. Stephen was unaware of how long he's been waiting for this, specifically. He kisses back. Braces a hand at Loki's head just to keep him where he is. Loki parts his lips as quick as his legs, and Stephen drinks it up.

Loki's tongue runs along his. Swallows and pops back wet. Stephen doesn't realize what's going on until Loki is sinking down, and suddenly everything is hot and amazing. Stephen's head flops back against the chair cushion.

"We're a horrible example of safe sex."

“Gods don’t catch STI’s.”

Loki braces his hands on Stephen’s shoulders. A smile is come and gone, before he rises up and starts to ride him in earnest. Up and down, little bounces, breathy gasps. Stephen holds his hips and just fucking watches.

It’s stunning. Loki readjusts himself, makes a face and rides harder. Chases his own pleasure, using Stephen like a toy.

Stephen runs his thumbs along his hipbones, and Loki hits the right spot and sighs. His hair is falling out of the band, strands everywhere, so Stephen pushes it back for him.

Loki starts to build a pace. He bites his own lip in concentration. A moan falls out of Stephen before he can stop it.

“Fuck,” Loki purrs, head lolling, body rolling with it. “Yes – baby, *that’s* it. Talk to me.”

Stephen drags his lips up his neck. Closes his eyes and drops his hands to Loki’s ass. Loki is positively *buzzing*.

“Look at you,” Stephen mumbles. “You don’t even need me. I could sit here all day and just watch.”

Loki shivers. Stephen sucks beneath his ear.

“You’re gorgeous, but you already know that.” Stephen slips a hand between them, and gives Loki something to fuck up into. His cock is red and wet and bouncing, so Stephen makes a loose fist and Loki nearly ragdolls. “You’re doing so well, so good sweetheart, that’s right.”

Stephen plants his feet and rolls his hips up once. Loki jerks like he touched a livewire.

“Yes! Oh Norns—” Loki whines, hand scrambling to dig into Stephen’s hair. His nails dig tight, and Stephen nearly comes.

Stephen moves up as Loki goes down, and they work like perfect, synchronized clockwork. The nightgown falls off Loki’s shoulders, gathering in the crooks of his arms. His thighs slap against Stephen’s, strong like a warrior, and Stephen finds himself wishing he could remember every detail of this.

Stephen finishes first, this time. It’s impossible not to. His body tenses and his chest vibrates and he’s powerless to stop it. Loki’s hands fly to his cheeks, kissing him, saying, “*Yes, yes like that, in me – in me--*”

Loki spills over Stephen’s palm and up his chest, shaking like a man half-frozen. Stephen runs a hand down his thigh, just to feel the muscles tense.

It takes a moment to get their bearings. Two, three, four.

Stephen sighs, hands moving up and down both his legs now. He speaks soft. “What am I going to do with you?”

Loki makes some incomprehensible noise, and lazily pulls the nightgown back up over one shoulder. His eyes are closed. Curiously, Stephen reaches back around to feel where they’re still connected. Loki jerks, hand flying for his wrist –

“Don’t!”

“What?”

“Just – give me a second,” Loki breathes. Stephen drags his hand away to rest at his lower back, and Loki trembles from that too. Oh. He’s oversensitive.

“The doctor in me wants to cut you apart,” Stephen mumbles. “I’d love to see how your nerves work.”

“Then do it,” Loki whispers. He presses a palm to his own chest, and glows it orange. It lights up his insides, revealing the intricate network of veins. It’s immediately recognizable as not human.

Stephen’s jaw drops. Loki pulls his hand away, and takes the glow with it.

“Wow,” Stephen breathes.

“There’s more,” Loki smiles. “But that’s for another day.” He sits up, finally pulling out. Stephen wraps a sigil around his wrist, and in seconds, they’re clean once more.

“Are you going back?” Stephen asks. Loki takes a peak at Stephen’s watch.

“I suppose.”

“I’m not much of a cook, but there’s a great calzone place around the corner.”

Loki shifts in his lap, still brazen in nothing but the gown. He curls into his chest.

“What is a calzone?”

“Have you had pizza?”

“Uh, duh.”

“It’s like a pizza sandwich.”

“I must have one immediately.”

“Give me ten minutes.”

An extraterrestrial crawls out of a sewage hole just a mile down the street from the sanctum.

They're short staffed, and Stephen is reluctant to leave the sanctum unguarded; the lives of an innocent few, or the possible loss of their reality itself?

Fire smokes into the clouds, and Stephen can hear the screams from his window. So he leaves on a hope and a spell.

Stephen comes back to a black cat sitting at the sanctum steps. Not sleeping. Just watching. Solid blue eyes too human to be an alley cat.

He pretends to ignore it.

They're using magic today.

Stephen *was* being productive. He'd met with Wong about the new recruits, taught a class on acupuncture (to his medical dismay), and even found an hour to organize random scrolls in the vault.

But, as it goes, Loki comes in like a breeze, and takes Stephen away with him.

Loki's wrists are tied high above his head, but you'd guess Stephen was the one in chains. The spell glows a low gold, and it lights up the veins of his arms.

"Harder, *harder*, I said – "

"You don't always get what you want," Stephen says, one of Loki's thighs hooked under his arm. He's working at his own pace, a little on the slow side, just to watch Loki squirm.

"I hate you," Loki spits. "You do that on purpose."

Stephen hums, "Oh absolutely. But you know the secret word."

Loki rolls his eyes. "Please."

"With a little soul, come on."

Loki responds with even more deadpan.

"*Please* fuck me harder, oh great sorcerer supreme."

"That wasn't so bad," Stephen smiles, and then rams in like a fucking freight train. Loki makes a winded noise, and the bindings glow bright as Loki thrashes against them.

He moans a long *fuck yes* – and plants a foot in the mattress to try and meet Stephen thrust for thrust.

Damn this guy. He always makes Stephen work up a sweat, doesn't he? It's no matter, Stephen likes it anyways. The nerves in his hands aren't strong enough to really dig into Loki's thigh, but he does use his arm strength to yank his knee up higher, to spread him farther, to force in deeper. The noise he gets in return is very, very worth it.

Stephen craves this. The back and forth, the skin and sweat and the overexertion. Loki twists so beautifully, spays like a goddess in those old Greek statues.

"Please!" Loki begs, "Touch me – please, please—"

"*Loki??*"

He jerks to a stop. Loki freezes up completely.

“Wizard?? Hello?”

Loki’s eyes go comically large. Stephen’s eyes go just so.

“Holy shit,” Stephen whispers, just as Loki hisses in a dead panic, “Thor!!!!”

“Hello?!”

Loki starts speed-repeating an incantation, but Stephen breaks the bonds for him. Loki moves wicked fast,

“Uh!! Hold on a second! Be right there!” Loki calls. Stephen pulls out, and Loki repeats, “Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck-“

Stephen tries to catch his breath.

“What do we do?”

“Fake study, now, right now. Grab a book, grab anything,” Loki flies out of bed. “Uh, *fuck*, pants-“ he waves an arm, and clothes them both. Stephen looks down at his jeans and t-shirt.

“These aren’t even mine.”

“Grab a book! Now!” Loki jumps out into the hallway, just as Thor rounds the corner. “Oh, hello brother.” He stands to casually block the bedroom doorway.

Stephen casts a quick rejuvenation spell on the room. The bed makes itself, the air sprays clean of sex.

“Hello! How do they say it...uh... I was in the neighborhood!”

“Doing what?”

Stephen jerks a hand down his jeans to adjust himself, and scrubs his eyes to try and ignore the still ever present reminder that he was probably seconds away from finishing.

“Well, Stark said he had an upgrade to my armor, which I thought was hilarious, because the pads of my chest plate were forged in Nidavellir-“

Right. Thor.

Stephen portals a book into his hand, and walks towards Loki in the doorway.

“Aha!” He fakes. “I found it. I knew I had this shoved in my closet somewhere.”

“Oh, Strange,” Thor smiles. “How are you?”

“Doing well, thank you.”

“Ahh, finally, now we can get somewhere.” Loki takes the book out of his hands, and starts to walk towards the living room. There’s a slight, *slight* limp in his right leg, and Stephen bites down on his lip.

Thor trails after him, “What is it, brother?”

Loki opens the book and skims it and, bless his cleverness, he says, “Soundless incantation. My

favorite type of spellcasting. Words and relics bore me.”

“As always,” Thor laughs. He digs in his pocket, “Ah, well, Stark wanted me to bring you this. It’s a-“

“Phone?” Loki takes it. “From Stark?”

“Yes?”

“Strangely kind of him.”

“He thinks you should have one, if you are to ever connect with the other Avengers.” Thor grins, “I am still convincing him of your loyalty.”

“I hope it to ever be as strong as yours,” Loki squeezes his arm, and then drops onto the couch.

Stephen pretends to fiddle through the shelves in the library; he watches Loki browse through a few pages in the book. Trying to look occupied. He subtly crosses his legs, and keeps the book over his lap. Stephen can feel himself sweating.

“Are you finished here?” Thor peeks over his shoulder, “You look as if you are still busy.”

Loki’s head snaps up, and the look on his face is exactly the way Stephen feels.

Hell. No.

“Do I have a curfew?” Loki teases. “I believe you said I could stay as long as I pleased.”

“I do not want you to overstay your welcome.”

“He’s fine,” Stephen says, maybe a little too quickly. “It’s mostly just me, anyways.”

Thor gives him a thoughtful look, before nodding.

“Okay then! I will see you to break fast tomorrow, brother.”

“As always.”

“You should come visit soon, Strange,” Thor begins to descend down the sanctum stairs. “We’ve made great progress.”

“I will,” Stephen follows him. “I’d like to see it in the springtime. I’m not much for the cold.”

“Farewell!” Thor waves. Stephen waves back, before shutting and locking the door behind him.

There’s the sound of a swing, and a large summon of magic. Wind shakes the door, and then silence. Stephen sighs, and taps his forehead against the door.

A hand grabs his wrist, and flips him back over against the wall.

“Fuck, fuck, I’m so sorry,” Loki reaches for his zipper, undoes his jeans, and pushes down both their underwear. “I was so close — i have to — right now, right *now* —”

“Me too— “ Stephen curses, and yanks Loki closer by his beltloops. Loki grabs them both in his hand; Stephen quickly leans over to spit, and Loki jerks them off furiously, head pressing against Stephen’s shoulder. It’s an incredibly lewd sound, and Stephen can’t look away.

Stephen pulls him closer, grinds up into his hand, nearly bites through his tongue. “I thought I was going to die.”

“I’m going to kill him,” Loki hisses, and then comes first, rocking up against him, Stephen not that far after. His toes curl and his head smacks against the wall, and it might be the hardest he’s ever come in his *life*.

They’re left breathing. Heaving. Sweating. Stephen breaks out into a laugh. Loki smacks his shoulder.

“Shut up!”

It only makes Stephen laugh harder, and Loki looks upwards, desperately trying not to smile, but failing anyways.

He flips through a page, pops his gum, and points.

“This is wrong.”

Stephen stops. He’s mid-reach, setting back a Runic Axe from where it was stolen just days ago.

“How do you keep getting in here?”

“The same way I keep getting out,” Loki says. “This is wrong.”

“That’s impossible.”

“Welcome to the impossible.”

Stephen walks his way, “What book is that?”

“Um,” Loki flips to look at the cover. “Romota Rūkhmar.”

“That was written by Merlin,” Stephen stares. Loki stares back, like he has no idea who that is. “You know? Merlin? One of the greatest wizards of our realm?”

“Your standards are way too low.”

“Oh fuck you. What part is wrong?”

“His theory on Æsir. It’s not a power source, its – it is a *being*.”

Stephen tips his head. He takes a seat on the arm of the couch, and looks over his shoulder. “Really now?”

“You’re either born an Æsir, or you are not. It isn’t something you take from.”

“But all magic comes from somewhere.”

Loki rolls his eyes, “Yes, and you Midgardians rely on relics. We rely on ourselves.”

“Huh. I always assumed you were using the realm’s energy.”

“No. Thor and I draw from our inner self.”

“Amazing,” Stephen says, without really thinking. “I guess that’s why they call you Gods.”

“You should throw this away,” Loki snaps the book shut, and tosses it. Stephen catches it in a spell, and draws it back to his hand.

“*No* – we are not throwing it away. It was written by Merlin.”

“I still don’t know who that is and I don’t care,” Loki flips his legs over the arm of the chair, and sprawls his arms dramatically. “I demand more calzones.”

“That’s nice.”

“Stephen~ I’m not allowed in public. You must get it for me.”

“Oh like that’s stopped you before.”

Loki sits back up, “What is it that has you so busy?”

Stephen sighs, and draws out a stack of books from a pocket dimension.

“Wong recently discovered an archive of stolen knowledge in Chennai. We have to restore them and figure out which ones might be copies.”

“I can do that,” Loki says.

Stephen stares.

Loki scoffs, “Come now. Buy me a pizza sandwich, and I will restore your books for you.”

Loki pronounces the word *pizza* way too cute. Peet-za. Stephen has to pretend to put on a mean face.

“How on earth can I trust you to do that.”

“I was quite good at ink restoration, back on Asgard,” Loki picks at a goose feather sticking out of the chair cushion. “While Father received gold and riches, I’d take any book that caught my eye.”

“So you stole it.”

“I gave it a better home,” Loki turns up his nose. “So?”

Stephen breathes in, and out. He then points, “If I find anything pinched from these books, I will know.”

Loki portals the books into his arms, almost gleefully. “I might be a snake, but I do have a respect for mystic history.”

Stephen tries to get a read on him. He’s in black spandex shorts and a floppy green sweater (ever the one to match the rest of his wardrobe), and his hair is in a bun, and he’s not demanding anything other than a fucking calzone.

So once more, against his better judgement, Stephen leaves to walk the quarter-block to Joe’s.

He returns with a hot plastic bag and a pocketwad of napkins; he half-expects to find the sanctum in pieces. But no, Loki is spread on the floor, hands crossed two-fingers over one, slowly skimming the page of a water-logged spellbook. The page folds straight, and the print bleeds black, and some of the symbols start to become legible again.

“You’re good at that,” Stephen says.

“Told you.” Loki looks up, “That smells stupid good.”

“Come eat in the kitchen.”

“I’m not going to *spill*.”

“You don’t know that,” Stephen says, and waves around the takeout in a *come and get it~* kind of way. Loki heaves himself to his feet and climbs to sit up on the counter top.

“I meant the table.”

Loki ignores him. He sniffs out his calzone, daintily picking it up in a napkin and taking a big bite. Stephen settles at the kitchen table like a normal person. Loki turns towards him, after wiping his mouth with a napkin.

“Whatever happened with the Vishanti?”

“Oh lord,” Stephen exasperates, “Brace yourself for this.”

Loki shifts, readying himself. Stephen tells him all about his visit to the extradimension. He’s surprised to learn that Loki has also visited the Vishanti once, in his youth, and he doesn’t realize until later that this might be the first, genuine conversation they’ve ever had.

They end up having sex up against the kitchen counter, but that’s besides the point.

Chapter 4

“Sorcerer Supreme, your kindness is appreciated beyond words.”

The student bows, hair falling off her shoulders. She's a short girl, but stocky and strong from her training.

“Doctor, please. And don't worry about it,” Stephen says. “Sling rings are difficult to master.” He then pats her shoulder. “The Ancient One dropped me on Everest for my training.”

She pales, “I am glad you did not do that.”

“Master Hamir will help you with your meditation.”

“Yes Doctor Sorcerer Supreme.” She bows once more, and scurries off into the temple. She's young, but Stephen can already sense a great power in her.

Powerful students are always a gamble. They're strong in their beliefs, but more susceptible to corrupt magic.

They're also a bit of a smartass. Yeah yeah pot, kettle.

The last three days were spent overseeing trainees in Kamar-Taj, so he's relieved to return to the sanctum. Its clean and in order, every relic accounted for. He'll have to thank the apprentices later.

Stephen strolls into his bedroom, and doesn't flinch at Loki in his bed. Something should be said about that, but whatever. He simply strides past him, and unhooks the cloak from his shoulders, untying the wraps on his arms.

“Where did you find that?”

Loki pulls out an earbud, and glances up, “Hm? It was in your drawer.” He flips over to his stomach, and scrolls through the ipod. “There are some passable songs in this device.”

“Passable? I have impeccable taste in music, thank you.” Stephen takes a seat next to him on the bed, and slides a hand up and down the length of his back. Loki purrs.

“I like this one.” Loki turns the screen to show him. Stephen snorts.

“Donna Summer. I knew there was a reason I tolerated you.”

Loki elbows him, but doesn't move from his stomach.

“She works hard for the money, Stephen. How can I not respect her talent?”

Stephen does laugh this time, and runs his hand down to playfully smack his butt.

“Speaking of MacArthur park, Washington Square is holding First Friday tonight.”

This is such a bad idea. He should care, but he doesn't.

Loki rolls around to his back, shuffling so his legs are in Stephen's lap.

“What is that?”

“Um, like an artwalk. There’s music and food and stuff,” Stephen says. His heart is beating super fast. Damn it. “You don’t have to.”

Loki frowns. “I’m not allowed to walk freely in American streets.

“Well uh. If you want to go...” Stephen snaps his fingers into his fist, lighting up a spell, before pressing two fingers to Loki’s forehead. Loki jerks, hands flying to his head.

“What the hell did you just do to me?”

“A concealment spell. Anyone that sees you will see a face other than yours.”

Loki scrambles out of the bed, and jumps to look in Stephen’s mirror. When he sees nothing but himself, he turns his face this way and that, “Will I look ugly?”

Stephen rolls his eyes.

“Maybe. You’ll look forgettable.”

Loki sighs. He then turns on his heel, and demands, “When are we leaving?”

“As fast as I can redress.”

Loki starts to change clothes in the mirror, outfits phasing on and off. Stephen steps into his closet. It’s getting colder, so he grabs a coat and a scarf to throw over his turtleneck.

When he steps out, Loki is still changing clothes. He rolls up the sleeves of a coat, and phases through a couple different pairs of pants. Stephen leans up against the doorway.

“Nobody will remember you anyways.”

Loki’s neck goes pink. He bristles up and hisses, “Well maybe *I* want to look good.”

Stephen lifts his hands, “Okay, okay.”

When Loki is finally happy with the stretchy pants he had on first, he bounces on the balls of his feet, and smiles. Stephen’s heart falls straight out of his ass. For a moment, all he can hear is blood in his ears.

Loki is waiting, so Stephen spins his fingers and opens a portal into an abandoned tree in the park. Loki goes out first, and is immediately struck silent in awe. There’s lanterns strung from the trees, and the sun is long gone. You can’t see the stars here in the city, but there’s booths cooking over fires, and children running through the grass.

“A festival,” Loki looks up, into the lights in the trees. “You should have said so.”

“I guess you could call it that.”

Stephen closes the portal, and follows Loki as he b-lines it towards the stalls. A band is playing far across the park, and it fills the air with music.

“Look!” Loki pulls a scarf off a rack, and wraps it around his neck. “This is my color, Stephen.”

“Three for thirty,” the little old Indian lady says.

“All you wear is green.” He picks up a red one, and wraps that around Loki’s neck instead. “How’s

this?”

Loki scrunches up his nose, and sets it back on the stand. “Reminds me too much of my brother.”

His attention is swept away by the next booth, and so it goes. Stephen is content to follow. It’s been a while since he thought about something other than the dire state of their multiverse, so the change is nice.

Stephen loses track of Loki twice, and only panics once. He finds him standing in front of a food truck, blinking.

“What are those?” Loki points.

“Uhh,” Stephen squints. “That’s funnel cake.”

“It looks nothing like cake.”

“It’s really sugary.”

“I want one.”

Stephen lifts his eyebrows. “You got money?”

He keeps a straight face while Loki ruffles his little feathers – but not for long, because he starts to laugh when Loki’s face turns red.

“Here,” Stephen says, and hands him a five. Loki nearly elbows a little boy to get in line. Stephen apologizes to the mother.

Loki walks through the rest of the isle picking at a funnel cake. He makes it halfway before he suddenly stops, looks down, and wordlessly offers the plate to Stephen.

He’s not really a sweets guy, but he picks off a piece just to make him happy. Loki resumes his browsing, thumbing through jewelry and patches and handmade blankets.

Their shoulders brush as they walk. It’s times like these that remind Stephen of how tall Loki is. He’s been staring all evening, so either Loki hasn’t noticed, or he’s chosen not to.

They’re in a jewelry booth, farther away from the music, when Loki mumbles,

“Almost a year on Earth, yet all I see are your bedroom walls, and our cold shoreline.”

Stephen blinks, and sets down a trinket.

“Really?”

“I don’t go anywhere else,” he says. “I am...reluctant to break what little trust my brother has in me.”

Some shallow, ugly part of Stephen is relieved to know that he’s probably the only one Loki has been sleeping with. Not that Stephen has any right to his body. But. It still makes him feel special.

Stephen clears his throat.

“Thor believes in you.”

“He believes I will betray him.” Loki picks up a necklace, and studies the beading.

Stephen slides next to him, and pretends to study the necklace as well.

“Will you?”

“Inevitably.” He sets it down, and immediately picks up a yellow hand-knitted beanie. “Buy me this!”

“If you wanted a sugar daddy, you’ve been barking up the wrong tree.”

Loki replies smoothly, “If I wanted a sugar daddy, I would’ve stayed on Sakaar.”

Stephen rolls his eyes. Loki sticks out his tongue. He slides on the beanie, pulling it down over his ears. There’s little fluffy balls on the end, and it’s a bit silly and kind of adorable.

“Then I guess I’ll just have to steal it~”

The vendor tenses.

Stephen sighs, and pulls out his wallet again. He’s only got about thirty bucks in cash, so he hands the man a twenty, and pushes Loki out by his lower back.

“Come on, before I go broke.”

Loki plays with the hat the rest of the night. He fiddles with the pom-poms, twirling it around his finger and ruffling the yarns. Stephen can’t resist grabbing one and yanking. Loki yelps, and grabs it before it falls.

“Fiend!”

Stephen laughs, and stops abruptly when he finds himself reaching for Loki’s hand. He abandons the action quickly, shoving his hands in his pockets.

This isn’t a date. He must remind himself, this isn’t a date. That’s okay.

He opens a portal back to the sanctum that night. Loki doesn’t follow him.

“I should go,” Loki says. He’s still playing with the hat.

“Okay.”

“Um,” Loki looks away. “Thank you. This was...”

“Yeah.”

Loki smiles at him. Not evil, not seductive, not sarcastic. But simple and lopsided and genuine.

And at that very moment, Stephen takes one look at him, and wants to kiss him goodnight. Loki’s face is orange and purple from the lantern lights, skin flawless and unbothered by the cold. Stephen feels the world crash down around him.

He wants to take his hand. He *wants* this to be a date. His heart falls out of his stomach, and his lungs shrink three sizes too small.

Realization dawns like a storm.

“Goodnight,” Loki says, eyes on his feet.

“Goodnight,” Stephen manages.

Within one single blink, Loki has evaporated into nothing.

Stephen has made a mistake.

Today 5:34 P.M.

> come over

Stephen stares at his phone. The number is unrecognizable.

5:40 P.M.

Who is this?? <

5:41 P.M.

> who do you think, asshole

> we're opening the grand hall tonight

5:42 P.M.

Loki? <

5:42 P.M.

> *No shit*

> *Thor wishes you to come*

5:43 P.M.

Just Thor? <

Very distantly, Stephen hears, “*Oh for the love of –* “ before Loki steps through a support beam in the sanctum, and waves his phone around.

“*I want you to come!*” Loki hisses. “The hall will be full of drunken rebels fattening themselves on Asgardian mead, and I am *narrowly* to avoid killing myself amongst the noise.”

Stephen crosses his arms, phone still in hand.

“And why should I go?”

“Because there’s free food, and you can’t cook.”

Hmm. Point made.

Loki is in a formal dress. A tunic and pants too intricate to be for daily wear. There’s a crown of silver thorns in his hair, and a garnish of bracelets on his wrists. It’s obvious they were meant to be gold, but Stephen can assume any gold they had went towards the rebuilding of Asgard.

He still looks stunning.

“Are you driving?”

Loki lets out an annoyed breath through his nose. With a quick two-fingered gesture, a slick, tar looking portal opens into the wall. Hm, so that’s how he’s been doing it.

“Come now,” Loki gestures. “I can give you a tour while my brother tells his speech.”

He disappears into the tar.

Dread fills Stephen like a ten foot pool.

In the weeks since the festival, Stephen hoped the uh – feelings, and yuck – would be gone by now. They have no logic, no reason in Stephen’s heart. Loki is manipulative and greasy (sometimes) and demanding and hogs all the blankets just so Stephen can’t have them and he always leaves the sink running and he heals Stephen without asking and he’s protective when he thinks nobody is watching and wrinkles up his nose when he’s shy and his eyes are —

Anyways. It obviously snowballed instead. Rolled and grown and now Stephen is powerless to stop himself from following Loki into hell and back.

What kind of idiot falls for the devil?

The portal is waiting. It makes a black, bubbling sound.

This is fine. It's casual. They agreed on casual. Stephen is cool.

A hand pops back through the portal, and gestures impatiently. Stephen steps on through.

His senses are overloaded immediately. His brain takes in information through sight, sound and smell.

The building is tall. Not made of marble or gold, but plaster and stone. It's embellished with intricate filigree, painted in a gold color to mimic what Asgard might've been. Stephen can only assume.

The hallway is long and breezy. Stephen can hear the sea. It smells of salt and spices.

"Wow." Stephen looks up, to the high ceilings. "The last time I was here all this was just –"

"Rock," Loki spits. "Nothing but rock."

"You've been busy."

"Some of our architects survived Ragnarok."

"That's fortunate."

"Very." Loki starts to walk, hands behind his back. "Come."

There's rows of hallways, and big windowless holes. It's obviously missing glass – probably soon to come. Through the windows, you can see lines of homes along the cliffside. The waves crash far in the distance, pale grey and cold.

Loki is a shit tour guide. He walks briskly, gesturing, *bedroom, bedroom, hall, that's a rock, another rock* –

The longer they walk, the closer the laughter bleeds through the hall. Warm light is glowing from a corridor far at the end. They pass a wall of newly painted frescos; Stephen stops to look at it.

"That's you."

"I might've had a hand in it." He sighs, and sets his hands on his hips. "They never get my eyes right."

"It's beautiful," Stephen says, because it is. Loki looks like a goddess. A gold halo behind him, black hair painted to exaggeration. Arms spread, fabric folds painted to excruciating detail.

Loki sniffs, and looks away.

"Of course it is. It's me."

Stephen smiles tiredly, and in his moment of weakness, brushes his hand down to Loki's lower back.

"We're missing your brother's speech."

Loki very, very subtly leans into him, and turns on his heel to walk once more.

“Yes well, I heard him rehearse it six times in the bathing room. It’s nothing special.”

“How supportive of you.”

“I resisted the urge to slice off his tongue. That is support enough.”

When they turn into the main hall, the noise of the room hits him face first. It’s full of Asgardians and aliens alike, feasting and cheering on big, long tables. There’s food and food and more food, lamps and torches lit along the ceiling.

A throne rests at the head of the room. Really, it’s just a chair. Thor isn’t in it anyways.

“Wizard!” Thor says, popping up like a gopher. “You did come!”

“I was invited last minute,” Stephen looks at the frescos, several stories above his head. “Thor, this is stunning.”

“Come, come eat,” Thor steals him, and pushes towards a table with empty seats. There’s a woman there, eating a turkey leg with a personal vengeance. Thor waits for Stephen to take a seat on the bench, before joining.

The woman looks up and mumbles, mouth full, “Yer majesty.”

“This is an Asgardian tradition,” Thor pours Stephen a glass of mead. “We would feast for days and days. Usually with very little cause.”

“Thank you,” Stephen takes the goblet and peers inside. He has the distinct feeling that a glass alone could put him in the hospital. He takes a pretend sip just to be nice. “You know the Avengers would love to be here.”

Thor, of all people, decidedly gets shy. He focuses on a roll of bread, breaking a piece and shoving it in his mouth.

“I suppose. But they are quite busy. And they have aided us greatly these few months already.”

Stephen takes the roll offered, and says softly,

“Thor. They’d come.”

He gives a half-smile and nods, “Then next time I shall invite them.”

Stephen suddenly looks behind him, and realizes that Loki has already disappeared. Thor notices right away.

“Don’t mind my brother. He’s not much for the feasting.”

“He could probably use it,” Stephen says, and then immediately recoils because he’s an *idiot*.

Thor only laughs, “Yes. He’s always been a skinny little thing.” He smiles, friendly, “How are your dates?”

Stephen nearly swallows his tongue. He coughs into his palm, and wheezes, “Excuse me?”

“Your meetings! Loki still visits you for your books, does he not?”

Right. Right, okay.

“Yes,” Stephen nods. Fuck, his face is red. “He’s uh, he’s made himself useful. He helped me restore some texts last month.”

At least that one isn’t a lie.

“I’m glad. He’s been a much happier soul, as of late.” Thor offers him a turkey leg.

“No thank you – but um. That’s good, I guess.”

“He’s one for the dramatics, that’s for sure. You don’t want to cross his path in a foul mood.”

A body slips in next to him. Lithe and covered in jingly bracelets.

“Ears burning?” Stephen smiles.

Loki slaps a handful of forks on the table.

“There. You have no idea how hard it was to find these.”

“Just eat with your hands, brother. It’s tradition.”

“I’m not a *beast*.”

“No, just a prude, apparently.”

Loki picks up a roll and chucks it at his face, and Thor is laughing too hard to catch it. Stephen feels very Malcom-In-The-Middle-y, at least, until Loki’s thigh presses up against his own beneath the table, and their elbows brush as he reaches for a glass of wine.

It’s not how Stephen planned on spending the evening. He sneaks a glance to Loki every so often – crown on his head, jewelry in his ears, shoulders rolled back and fork politely disappearing between his lips.

He’s different here. It’s not a bad different.

Stephen doesn’t have much of an appetite, so he picks off Loki’s plate, and tries to avoid getting his hand stabbed with a fork. Thor is watching them closely. Stephen feels a bit like a boyfriend meeting the parents.

But it’s not like that. It’s really not like that.

Loki leads Stephen to his room that night. Once the hall is half-asleep and half-dead, and the moon is way too high to excuse being awake.

His room is dark and simple, embellished with fine engravings on the baseboards, and big windows to view the black sea. A simple bed, a dresser of jewelry, a knife pinned in the wall.

Loki presses him up against the windowsill, and they make out under the moon.

Stephen hates armies.

Ten, fifteen? Fifty even? He's got that in the bag. Mirror dimension, pop a few spells, boom. Done.

But thousands? Hundreds of thousands? He's not twenty-one and hyped on coffee anymore.

Also, why does it always have to be in the city? Why not like, a desert. Or the arctic. Or somewhere *not* surrounded by a population of civilians.

Stephen was able to portal in most of the Avengers, but even T'Challa's army is weakening. Wanda is at his side, lighting up as many as she can without overdrawing power. Stephen has her back; he summons the Seven Suns of Cinnibus, but not even the fire from hell could light up enough of these bastards.

The sun is going down, and it's harder to see, and someone needs to come up with a game plan soon.

"I'm going to the Captain, he says they have injured!" Wanda shouts over the battle. Stephen is reluctant to nod. She takes off in a red blur.

Stephen immediately gets sideswiped off his feet. It fucks up his shoulder, and he wheezes from the pain. A beast pins him down and jeez, these things are ugly. Two legs, six arms, way too many eyes. The cloak rolls Stephen out from under it. The alien lunges after him. Green fire lights it up.

Stephen squints in the flash, and covers his eyes with one hand.

"Loki?"

"Still alive I see."

It's him. Cape flowing, arms outstretched in a cocky, self-righteous way. There's a wall of green fire blocking them from the rest of the battle.

Loki offers a hand. Stephen takes it.

"Took you long enough."

"Nobody invited me!"

"We were a little preoccupied," Stephen says, and rolls his newly bruised shoulder.

Loki is in his horns and armor, and hell, Stephen is really, really glad to see him. Loki summons a knife and twirls it in his hand. He stands tall and proud like, well,

A god.

"Are you injured?"

"I was stabbed, but I was able to heal it halfway."

"Is it fatal?"

"No, unfortunately for you."

Loki rolls his eyes. He presses a hand to the slice on Stephen's cheek; it starts to heal, and Stephen sighs when the throb fades away. Loki nods.

"Let us end this quickly."

Green, buzzing magic travels through Loki's veins. He lights up in the dark, a bright beacon of power.

Stephen grins, "I've been waiting to see this." He summons his own orange sigils.

"Don't fall behind."

"You wish."

They're a well-oiled machine. The adrenaline keeps them on their toes, and Stephen never has to watch his own back. Against all odds, Loki is there the whole way through.

Later, *way* later, when they're burned and charred and half-dead in their skin, they stumble back to the sanctum, and have sloppy sex against the shower wall. Steam floats to the ceiling, the water runs down the drain, and their hands burn outlines beautiful enough to be called art.

Stephen wraps Loki up in a towel before he can phase away. He swaddles him towards the bed – ignoring his half-muffled complaints and his giggly laughter, and dumps him on the sheets.

Loki rolls over, and Stephen traps him in his arms. Slippery and strong, Loki rolls them, and straddles Stephen's waist.

"What are you doing?" He laughs.

"I don't know." Stephen slides his hands up Loki's thighs, trembling only slightly. "I'm tired."

Loki leans down and over him, to press a kiss to his bottom lip. Stephen tips his head up and kisses back, and it's soft, it's too soft. Shower clean and dried warm, nestled in cotton sheets and post-glow satisfied.

Loki rocks a little against his stomach, hard again already. Stephen mumbles against his lips.

"You're insatiable."

"That shouldn't come as a surprise."

Stephen braces his hands against Loki's ass, and lazily thrusts upwards. Loki grinds back down, and so it goes. Not really going anywhere, not really *aiming* for anything – but Stephen thinks to the battlefield, to Loki at his back, and he goes hot all over.

Their kisses are long, drawn out. A slow conversation, something idle in the impossible hour. Loki sucks on his tongue and grinds against his cock. Stephen lifts a hand to feel through his still-wet hair.

He wants to keep this. He wants to keep it forever.

Loki comes soundlessly, still kissing, still hovering above him. He reaches between them to jerk Stephen off the rest of the way, but it's not quick, not sloppy, but mind-blowingly tender.

Loki is mumbling against his lips, now his cheek, his neck, saying something like *please, come on, I wish to see your face, I never get to see your face* –

And that's the end. Stephen allows this vulnerability. Allows Loki to brace his hands at his cheeks, and watch him come undone.

"Lovely," Loki says, and kisses him. They're still bone-dead, still sliced up and banged up, but it's perfect. It's finally perfect.

"We've ruined the point of bathing," Stephen says.

Loki sighs happily in agreement. He lays on Stephen completely, and mumbles away the mess with a spell. Stephen locks his hands at his lower back.

They don't say anything, for a while. The light from the hallway bleeds under the door. But not much else. It's a comfortable silence, and Stephen could fall asleep like this.

He breaks the peace.

"Stay," he says.

Loki hesitates. He rubs his nose into Stephen's shoulder.

"I can't."

"You can."

"Stephen," Loki sits up, and looks him in the eye. "I can't."

Stephen softly runs his knuckles along his arm. "Please. I won't tell."

Loki gives a sad, close-lipped smile.

"No."

"Stay."

"Quit asking!"

"I can't."

Loki puffs up, now annoyed. The room sizzles, the mood peaks.

"*Why?!?*"

"Because I'm in love with you."

Loki freezes. Stephen doesn't.

It's out there. It's out there. It's out there.

Loki's voice goes pin soft, and breaks.

"What?"

"I love you," he says. "So you should stay."

The air is delicate, impossible, teetering on the edge of a cliff. He can't take it back. He can't turn back time.

"No," Loki sits back, up on his heels. "No, you can't."

Despite it all,

"I do."

"You *can't*," Loki hisses, and scrambles off of him, sliding to the foot of the bed, "Stephen, we agreed."

His heart plummets. He nods and says, "I know. I'm sorry."

"*You* agreed! No commitments!" Loki's hair is floating off his shoulders, flicking past his cheeks, and his hands are shaking in anger. "*Betrayer!*"

Stephen sits up. Does he reach for him? Does he touch him? His eyes sting.

"I know. But I thought..."

Gentle kisses. Soft days in. Sex under the moon.

"What?! That I *loved* you?!" Loki laughs, and stands, nails running through his hair, clothes shifting on with a yellow glimmer. "This is done."

Stephen throws his legs over the edge of the bed and reaches for his arm, begging, "Loki, I didn't mean--"

"No. No. This – no." Loki presses his back up against the wall, and it starts to swallow him, black bubbly tar creeping around him. "Do not speak to me again."

Stephen drops his hand to his side. Loki disappears within the wallpaper. Stephen is left hollow.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Life goes on in the way it always fucking does. Relentless, and whether you like it or not.

Stephen hates it. He wishes he could strip the numb heartbreak from his skin with a potato peeler, and boil the rest of it right out of his chest. It's pathetic. It's stupid. It's his own fault.

But it's there, and it's there to stay. Stephen lands on acceptance. It happened, he said it, and it's done with.

Weeks go by. Stephen knows where to find Loki, but he won't be — *that* guy. Loki doesn't want to see him. Stephen will respect that.

It's hard to adjust to a sanctum without Loki. They say you don't appreciate what you have until it's gone, and it's true every fucking time. No one is thumbing through his shelves. No one is chattering on the kitchen counter. No one is spread across his bed. Stephen brought this on himself, and that's the worst part.

It's his pride. His stubbornness. Of all his mediation, all his efforts to change, and here he is.

Still trying to beat a river into submission.

He sees Loki at another one of Stark's parties. One of those, *congrats on defeating an alien invasion* kind, and it's really come full circle, hasn't it? Stephen against the wall. Loki hunched over a drink at the bar.

Except this time, Loki is doing all he can to avoid Stephen's eye. Stephen is fine with that. (But his chest hurts and hurts).

Tony comes by again, two wine glasses in one hand, but this time he nudges Stephen with his elbow and whispers.

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah," Stephen says. "Just flew a little too close to the sun."

He opens up the windows to the sanctum. Spring is coming, finally, and you can smell it in the rain. There's sun between the clouds, and day showers that bring humidity, but Stephen could do with a little bit of a change.

Unfortunately, the universe likes to throw another shit-ball in his court.

It's all over the newspapers. And the television. And Twitter.

"Brother of Thor, Loki Alive?!!!"

Stupid, *stupid* – how could Stephen forget the concealment spell. Well, quite easily, seeing as he was getting his ass handed to him by uh, an *army*.

It's a photograph from the night of the invasion. Blurry and dark, but undoubtably Loki. His hands are outstretched, power glowing at his palms, an alien at his mercy.

There's a public outcry. People say he deserves trial; others say he's a hero. Some downright say he deserves to die.

There's an emergency meeting called at HQ. Avengers file into the conference room in reluctant droves. The guest of honor sits crouched in a chair at the head of the table, knees to his chest. Loki's hair is matted and there's dark circles under his eyes and he looks absolutely miserable. For the first time in weeks, he meets Stephen's eye. Stephen's face is blank. So is Loki's.

"Hey, thanks for coming," Tony pats Sam on the shoulder as he takes a seat. "Um. You all know what's going on, so I'll cut to the chase. I couldn't cover up the photograph. It went viral way too fast."

Loki doesn't flinch, doesn't move. The mood is already tense.

"I think he should stand trial," Rhodes says. "Simple as that."

"He already stood judgement and served time on Asgard," Thor huffs. "He has more than made up for his sins since then."

"Yes, but he's on *Earth*, not Asgard."

"Technically, he's in New Asgard," Banner says. "He's not American."

"But he killed Americans."

Thor stands up, hand slamming on the table, "It wasn't his–"

Loki's head snaps up, and he barks, "*Brother!*"

Thor stops. He sits back down. The room cracks with more anxiety.

"If we're going to fight for this, we have to fight as a team," Tony sighs. "So whatever we decide, it has to be unanimous."

"The media will want a statement."

Wanda mutters, "They will put him on death row."

"You don't know that."

"Loki has saved the planet *several* times, he should be allowed to work under our supervision." Bruce tugs at his shirt sleeves, but stands his ground.

"That's not the issue," Steve speaks up, from where his arms are crossed. "It's *if* we can even trust

him.”

Loki rolls his eyes, but says nothing.

“I dunno... I haven’t seen him cause much trouble,” Scott shrugs.

“My brother is trustworthy. He is worth fighting for.”

Tony rubs his chin. “Alright, be honest. Can you vouch your life on his loyalty?”

Thor stays silent. Loki curls in on himself.

It’s almost as if Loki has rolled over and given up. The room breaks out into murmurs. Thor looks ashamed, but refuses to lie.

Tony turns to Steve, “Then maybe we should- “

“I will,” Stephen says. It goes dead silent. Loki looks up.

Tony blinks, “What was that?”

“I’ll vouch for his loyalty,” Stephen clarifies. He can feel all the eyes on him, but he’s determined anyways. He sits up in the chair, and sets his ever-trembling hands on the table. “I said I was... unsure, last time. I was honest, I didn’t know if he was trustworthy. But... six months have passed, and I can say without a doubt that he is.”

Steve gawks. “Uhh, you’re sure about that?”

“I swear on my life.”

Loki is staring, lips slightly parted, eyes wide. Stephen looks away.

Tony sighs, and speaks towards Loki, “That’s a big compliment you’ve earned there, pointy. Doc doesn’t hand those out like halloween candy.”

Loki still says nothing.

“He did fight in the invasion...” Rhodes starts, like he can’t believe what he’s saying.

“It’s obvious in the photograph. He was putting out a burning building.”

“God...damn it,” Natasha rubs her forehead. “We’re going to help a psychopath, aren’t we.”

“It’s starting to look like it.”

Thor physically relaxes. Loki hasn’t moved one bit.

“We’ll take a vote,” Tony says. “And then uh, I guess I’ll get my people working on a statement.”

Stephen steps out for some air. God knows he needs it.

He turns down another white tiled hallway, until he's far enough away from the chatter. He checks, just to make sure he's alone, before he sags his shoulders and blows out a breath, smoothing back the bangs in his face.

He leans up against the wall. The lights remind him of a hospital.

A hand grabs Stephen by the wrist, yanking him into an open room, and it scares the shit out of him so bad he nearly yells. Stephen fights on instinct, turning to jerk out of the grip – but he stops, seeing Loki.

The door bangs shut. Loki slams him against it.

“What the *hell* are you doing?”

Stephen blinks. They're in a clean boardroom, an abandoned one by the looks of it. The windows are tall, and the sun has long disappeared behind the rainclouds.

Loki is right in his face, teeth bared, radiating danger like the rattle on a snake. Stephen keeps a straight face, but looks him up and down.

“I think I could ask you the same thing.”

Loki scrambles back, as if burned. He's seething, absolutely boiling with anger.

“How could you?”

“I thought you never wanted to talk to me again.”

“I broke your heart,” Loki spits. He's put a fair distance between them, but he looks torn between clawing out Stephen's throat, or jumping out the window. “I broke your heart, and you said I was *trustworthy*.”

Stephen rolls his eyes. “I'm a grown man.”

“You stood up for me.” Loki softens. Only just. “How could you?”

Stephen sighs. He knocks his head back against the door, and closes his eyes.

“I don't know. It was – it was the truth.”

“So, what? An act of selflessness?”

“Loki, I said-“

“Sympathy? Compassion?” Loki tugs at his own hair and startles into a horrible, wicked laugh. “You had every reason to never be kind to me again.”

“Reason and heart are two separate entities.”

“Oh, that's *bloody* likely. You're just as moronic as every other human. ”

“Why are you being such an asshole about this!” Stephen hisses, trying not to shout. “Why do you *always* have to be such a –“

“I'm the asshole? Oh, *I'm* the asshole?”

“-this meeting was called for *you*, and yet you’re over there waving the white flag, don’t give a shit if you’re thrown in jail-“

“You think I care what Earth thinks of me! You’re *wrong!*”

“No! I’m *right!*” They’re face to face now. Stephen presses a finger to the center of his chest.

“I’m the only one who knows you really care. And that fucking terrifies you.”

“Oh you just love me *so* much, don’t you?!” Loki’s voice drawls with sarcasm, loud and mocking.

“Can you just get over-“

A fingers wrap around Stephen’s neck with enough pressure to snap it completely. Stephen’s body moves on a reflex; he gets a hand under his elbow, but Loki’s is squeezing hard, and his lungs start to burn as he chokes.

“Nobody mocks *me!*” Loki hisses. His left hand presses into Stephen’s forehead, and suddenly he’s slipping.

Memories. They fly by like a carousel, round and round. He can feel fingers in his brain. Picking around, digging into old boxes and tearing out all the things he’s kept hidden. Loki’s here, everywhere, in his ears and up his nose and behind his eyes. As angry as Stephen is, as much as he wants to scream and cry –

He missed this.

Stephen doesn’t care anymore. He doesn’t hide a thing.

Loki comes reeling back like a man on fire. He clutches his hand, heaving, eyes so wide he looks ten years younger. Stephen grabs for the handle to keep himself upright. His head pounds.

“You’re a douche,” Stephen pants.

Loki brings that hand to his chest, rod straight and shell shocked to his core. Loki speaks distant, almost to himself.

“You meant it.”

Then he disappears into a bubbling pool in the floor.

Stephen closes his eyes, and slams his head back up against the door.

“God dammit.”

The Avengers released their statement. Until the storm blows over, Loki will just have to lay low as he usually does.

Stephen tries not to care. Tries.

He's in his chair today. The one with the city view. You know, the one that Loki rode him for filth in, too many times. Yeah, that one.

Stephen presses his fingers under his nose. Taps his lips, and stares out the window.

The conference was a week ago, but it's been hard to move on. Stephen is okay with Loki hating him. Well, not *okay* – but, he'd live.

Except Loki jammed his fingers into Stephen's forehead, and rifled through his memories with a specific determination that tells Stephen he was looking for something.

And as masterful a sorcerer he is, even *Loki* cannot stop shared emotions from ricocheting in a meld. Stephen knows what he felt. And it was raw, dead panic.

It's not right. Stephen wishes they had a friendship to salvage – but they hardly had that, right?

No. They did. Calzones and books and sitting up by the window to talk about the stars. Loki is of the few who could ever, *ever* relate to who Stephen is, and what he does, and losing that is...

He's at a door.

Standing, cold, a breeze rustling through a hollow hallway. Huh, they finally got the windows in. It doesn't help much with the breeze.

It's a tall, wood door. There's etchings in the grain, a language that Stephen still doesn't understand. But he's been here once, and he'll never forget that.

Stephen raises his hand to knock.

"You won't find him there."

Stephen turns. Thor has turned down the hallway, an apple in hand.

"Oh?"

"Yeah," Thor swallows, and points with the apple. "You wanna' look for the ugliest, coldest part of the island."

"Thank you."

Thor shrugs, and keeps walking. He doesn't ask questions. Stephen really appreciates that.

His feet carry him out the palace doors, and towards the cliffside. There's a rocky path that's been chiseled out half-heartedly. If you misstep, you'd probably crack an ankle. It's way, way colder out here, a biting breeze that cuts through your clothes. Stephen didn't even grab the cloak; he's still in a baseball shirt and jeans.

Sure enough, there's a figure standing amongst the sand. No shoes, hands in his pockets, and he's way too underdressed for this kind of cold. The humidity has curled strands of his hair, and it's not slicked back, but free flowing and messy and –

"Go away."

"You're crazy," Stephen shivers, rubbing at his arms. Loki doesn't move.

"I'm a Jotun. Leave."

“We have to fix this,” Stephen sighs.

“Why? You miss your little toy?” Loki turns, eyes cold. “Miss getting your dick wet? Get over it.”

“If it was just that, you wouldn’t have left.”

“Fuck off,” Loki turns away. “I can kill you here, and no one will know.”

“You won’t.”

“Don’t be so sure.”

Stephen reaches out for his shoulder, “What are you so afraid of?”

“I’m not afraid!” Loki jerks out of his way, and Stephen’s fingers are shaking so, so bad from the cold and the pain, but he fights through it anyways. “I grew bored of you. Leave.”

Stephen smiles, “So it’s no fun when your puppets grow feelings.”

“Precisely,” Loki spits, still not meeting his eye. He’s clammed up. Shoulders by his ears, tense and so, so far from Stephen’s reach. There’s walls and walls, where there used to be wonder and mischief and desire.

He wants to touch him. Smooth out the wrinkles on his eyebrows and fix the hair in his eyes. He wants to strangle him, choke him by the throat and kiss him when he’s sorry. He wants, he wants, and he doesn’t know how to fix it.

This is beyond damage control. This is beyond taking it back. Or resetting time. This is something else entirely. There’s no use in the fear of breaking any more than he already has.

“I’ll leave.” He says. “But I have to know...” Stephen doesn’t move. Doesn’t reach out for him again. But looks out to the water, just as Loki is. “Are you incapable of feeling for me?”

“No,” Loki laughs, bitter and cold. “I love you.”

The wind knocks out of his chest. Stephen heaves in air, suddenly dizzy on his feet. Loki refuses to meet his eye. Stephen asks without filter,

“Then why are you doing this?”

“*Because* I love you!” Loki shouts, spinning away and pressing his hands to his face. “So go away.”

“Loki-“

“I destroy the people I care for. I was named the God of Mischief for good reason, and you should fear it! I will inevitably hurt you.” Loki digs his palms into his eyes, and whispers. “And I don’t want to. So quit being so persistent and go fuck yourself.”

Stephen’s heart is lodged somewhere between his throat and his tongue.

“You already hurt me,” Stephen says. Loki makes a face like he physically slapped him. Stephen takes another step forwards. “I hurt all the time.”

“Stop-“

Stephen grabs for his wrists. Loki makes a weak effort to fight him off.

“You love me.”

“I will *ruin* you.”

“You love me.”

“Stephen!-“

“You love me,” he says again, smiling now, leaning in to bump his nose against Loki’s. “You fool. The rest are just details.”

Loki cracks. He presses his forehead to Stephen’s, and closes his eyes, voice thick in his throat. Hands draw in his shirt.

“Why aren’t you afraid of me?”

“You’re an idiot for thinking I ever was,” Stephen says, and kisses him.

There’s a beast in his arms. Strong, potentially dangerous, stunning and proud.

Loki is tense. He wiggles around a little to rest his head on Stephen’s shoulder. They’re clothed; sweatpants and t-shirts and socks, and it’s new territory. All of this is new, it’ll always be new.

They’ve been here for hours. Stephen is still warming up from that icicle of a beach, but Loki is wrapped next to him, lukewarm and teddy-bear soft.

“*Take me home*,” he had said, so Stephen did.

At least the sanctum has heating.

Loki hikes up a thigh on Stephen’s hip. Stephen reaches down to grab behind his knee, and rest there. Music is playing from the house across the street, and the thump rattles the window ever so subtly. It’s still raining, but it’s just a soft patter. Of all that’s happened, Stephen doesn’t mind a slow night in. He could die here, for all he cares.

“You are making a mistake,” Loki eventually says. “And the Avengers are wasting their breath protecting me.”

Hmm. Probably. But since when has Stephen ever taken the easy route? He did fifteen years of schooling, that’s about as masochistic as it gets.

Loki still seems distressed.

Stephen hums. “Look me in the eye.”

Loki does.

“What do you want?”

“I don’t know.” He worries at his lip. “I lack the goodhearted will to do charity. But I wish to protect what’s mine. And as of now...this planet belongs to me.” He digs a thumb into Stephen’s throat. “Including you.”

“That’s all I need to know,” Stephen says, and leans his head back into the pillows. Another silence fills the room, but it’s not a bad one. Nails run along his arm, tracing unfamiliar patterns. It’s careful. Like Loki is afraid to touch him too much.

Stephen lets go of his knee to grab his hands, and press a kiss against the pads of his fingers.

Loki slowly starts to tense again. Stephen lets go, and doesn't pry. He can feel Loki tensing more, and more, as if bracing himself for something that won't come. Stephen waits. Minutes pass, until a stern, determined,

“Stephen.”

“Yes?”

“You really are making a mistake.”

“So I’ve been told.”

“I’ll betray you.”

“Most likely.”

“I’ll stab you.”

“It happens.”

Loki sighs, and presses a pouty kiss to Stephen’s mouth. “You’re making this rather hard.”

Stephen knows what he's trying to do, and he's not going to win.

"If you think you're more stubborn than me, then you've got something else coming." Stephen tucks Loki's hair behind his ear, and Loki bristles at the gentleness of it. He goes quiet. Thinking. Then.

"Stephen."

"Yes?"

“I’m going to show you something.”

Stephen blinks.

“Okay?”

Loki crawls up on his knees. This seems like uh, a sitting up thing, so Stephen does. He shoves the pillows behind his back, as Loki draws his hands in the hem of his shirt. He hesitates. Stephen places a hand at his hip, patient.

"Promise not to run away."

"I thought you wanted me to leave."

"Shut up."

"Fine-" Stephen laughs. "I won't run away."

Loki nods. He takes a deep breath, before hauling off the shirt all together. It's the same smooth chest that Stephen has seen a hundred times over.

"You asked me a question, a year ago. At Stark's party. You – you said *why the change of heart*." Loki's body shifts, a line of light starting at his neck, and phasing down to his waist. "This is why."

The magic peels away an illusion. Beneath it are long, ugly scars, that run in perfect lines. Hundreds upon hundreds, up his arms and down his stomach and perfect circles around his wrists. Stephen stops breathing. His hands move to cover them on an instinct. They're real.

Loki sniffs, and upturns his nose, "Don't look at me like that."

Stephen's brain takes off like a speeding car – *who, what, when, where* –

Oh.

"Thanos," Stephen breathes.

"When I discovered the lies of my father, I was angry," Loki says. He widens his arms. Lets Stephen feel around to the raised lines on his back. "I caused a great deal of trouble, and once caught, I realized it was death, or a life of prison. I wished for death, and I got it." His hands raise to his head, and he phases away an illusion along his cheek. A big, big handprint. Burned in red. "I was found by one of the Children of Thanos. In return for my life, I was to conquer Earth in his stead." He smiles, humorlessly. "This was the price for my initial rejection."

It's like the final peace of the puzzle.

"You said no."

"Of course I said no," Loki huffs. "Until he promised me revenge against my brother. I planned to steal both stones after the attack."

Stephen thumbs along the handprint on his cheek. "You still betrayed him."

"I am of the few he deemed worth killing by hand."

At last, a final handprint appears around his neck.

"I wanted to plead my case at the Avengers Headquarters," Loki says. "But I am reluctant for them to know I was ever so weak."

Stephen knows what it's like to be under the eye of pity. To be looked at like a charity, instead of a man. He says,

"Thank you for trusting me."

Loki blinks. Blinks again. Rubs at his eyes and then smacks Stephen's shoulder.

“I hate you.”

Stephen yanks him forwards, and smiles into his chest. His hands still feel around lines and lines of whip marks, and he sighs.

“I am internally seething with rage.”

“Hmmm, kind of sexy,” Loki grins. He grabs Stephen’s hand, and feels over his own pin-perfect scars. Stephen kisses under his chin.

“Yes, you are.”

Loki laughs to himself, his whole body sizzling with relief. He slivers under magic once more, skin turning blue, scars shifting to white-lined tattoos. “And this?”

“I’ll take you any way I can get you,” Stephen says, outright. Loki slaps his hands to Stephen’s cheeks, and kisses him.

They make love that night, once more, for the first time. Ever so new and exciting, they still bite and claw and fuck with abandon, but it means so much more than it ever did.

They’ll never be perfect, and that’s the best part.

“Oh don’t make me breakfast,” Loki sighs. “We’re a half-step away from bloody domestic.”

“Bold of you to assume that these are for you,” Stephen says, book in hand, as a spatula flips a pancake point perfect. He might not be a good cook, but pancakes he can definitely do.

Loki has the bed sheet still wrapped around his shoulders. He trudges into the kitchen, dips his finger in a bowl of batter and licks it.

“Thanks, that’s disgusting.”

“Way better than whatever that is,” Loki points. “What? Wet bread?”

Stephen catches Loki by the bedsheet before he can scamper away. He tugs, and forces Loki right between his legs.

“You’ve spent the last six days in my bed. I think we’re a bit past domestic.”

Loki pretend gags.

“Gross.”

“Your brother might be worried about you.”

“My brother can suck a cock.”

“Someone’s a morning person,” Stephen tucks his hair behind his ears. Loki softens a little, and wiggles around to hug him. He makes a defeated sound.

“What are we doing?”

“Romantically? No idea. Physically? *I* have to travel between realms today. Mephisto is out causing trouble in Vegas again.”

“Location, location, location.”

“There’s also a rogue zealot attacking ex Kamar-Taj students,” Stephen rubs at his forehead. “An old friend. Oh, and that damn squid is back again –“

“Sounds like you have your hands full,” Loki says, and grabs a handful of Stephen’s ass. “I can help.”

Stephen lifts an eyebrow. “You want to help?”

“Well the sooner you’re finished, the sooner you can take me on a date,” Loki grins.

“You hate domestics, but you want to go on a date.”

“I’m a *prince*. It’s about time you start treating me like one~”

“Yes, your majesty,” Stephen half bows, and Loki makes some kind of noise in this throat.

“Nope, nevermind, that just makes me hard.”

New Asgard is a different world in the summer. The rocky landscape is overtaken with grass and flowers, and the days stretch on and on and on.

“We had a flower festival, back on Asgard,” Thor says, legs stretched out in front of him. “It was a tradition started by my mother.” His fingers play in the grass.

“You planted these,” Stephen says, not asks.

“Yes.”

“You’ve really changed this place.” Stephen looks around them, to the cliffs and homes and real pebble streets.

Thor shrugs a shoulder, “There’s much more work to be done, but my people have seen enough hardship.” His clothes rustle in the wind.

Stephen breathes in. He’s still healing from their last battle, (poor New York, one day they’ll catch a break).

Thor is a nice guy to spend time with. He doesn’t talk, sometimes, but then he’ll talk *a lot*, and it’s good either way. He makes you forget about the world.

Wong is going to kill him for skipping out on teaching today. But, you know, Stephen kinda’ deserves a day off. He was nearly beheaded by an alien, twice.

Stephen wonders where Loki is. He's a slippery bastard, that one.

Some time has passed since the last meeting at HQ. Loki is still wanted; but the storm has passed, and so long as they can't catch him, they'll never have him. So far as Stephen is aware, nobody has ever caught a river.

As if sensing his thoughts, Thor looks his way and smiles.

"I am glad you made up with my brother."

Stephen blinks.

"Uh, uh huh."

"I heard of the fight." Thor makes a face, like a child trying not to laugh. "I hear library brawls can be dastardly."

Stephen feels his face fall totally flat. He looks over to Thor, completely dead inside.

No.

No, no way.

"You knew."

Thor cracks like a bull whip.

He breaks out laughing. Big, shoulder shaking hollers, wiping at his eyes as he starts to cry.

"You – you both – are *horrible* liars," Thor laughs more. Stephen uses the cloak to smack Thor along the arm.

"Are you kidding me! This whole time?!"

"It is as if you believe I was a good child," Thor wipes his eyes again. "I know the face of guilt. I snuck out of the palace thrice a week to lay with a woman from my class."

"I want to die." Stephen lays his face in his hands. "Just kill me."

Thor hunches up his shoulders and does a voice, "Oh! We're just studying brother!"

"Why didn't you just tell us you knew?"

Thor sniffs, and takes a few breaths to calm his laughter. He manages, "I have learned not to force Loki to tell me something that of which he wishes I know not. It ends in bloodshed and tears."

"You didn't want to out him."

"I wanted him to be happy," Thor says. He looks back to the ocean. "That's all I ever wanted."

A voice comes calling across the field.

"Thor! Your dreaded day has come!" Loki stomps through the flowers, calf-high in grass. "I am betraying you."

Thor smiles, "Ahh, are you?"

“Yes,” Loki lifts up a bag. “I am moving to the sanctum.”

Stephen crosses his arms, teasing, “And when were you thinking of telling me this?”

“Right now,” Loki drops the bag, and it slurps into the ground, swallowed by a black portal.

“Brother, I am dating the wizard.”

“Whaaaat?” Thor gasps. “Really? No. Really? Norns above, I had no idea.”

“You’re a terrible actor,” Loki turns up his nose. “There is a reason I never cast you in my theater.”

“Ouch,” Thor places a hand over his heart. “Will you come visit your dear older brother?”

“If the incentive so finds me,” Loki says, but he’s smiling now, like they’re both in on an inside joke. It’s obvious that he’s going to carry on like he always has. Floating wherever his will takes him.

Stephen opens his arm. Loki crawls right into his lap.

“I’m afraid I don’t have a spare bedroom.”

“That is truly a shame.”

“Alright, barf,” Thor waves his hand. “You two can leave now.”

The term "moving in" is relative. More like, I'll keep some of my stuff here, and I might grace you with my presence. Sometimes Loki is here, sometimes he's not. Stephen doesn't concern himself with it.

The sanctum has a couch, and an old T.V., and he finds Loki flicking through reality T.V. channels in the late hours. Stephen joins him, because time is relative anyways.

Loki sprawls against him, in the same way he sucks up all the air in a room. He's less concerned with the T.V., and moreso with Stephen's hands. His thumbs press up beneath his knuckles, smooth down to his palms and back.

"They're hurting."

"Always," Stephen replies. Loki scowls.

"Quit that. You know you can just ask me, dumbass." His hands glow green, and soon the pain starts to numb away. Stephen sighs.

"Thank you baby."

Loki shifts his cheek on Stephen's shoulder, and frowns. "I regret that I cannot remove the pain permanently."

"I've looked into it. The spell would require an extreme amount of power, it'd render me useless as a sorcerer."

"But you are not me," Loki grins, "And I am a prince and a god."

"Yes yes, you're the biggest dick in the universe."

Loki squeezes his hands and glares. Stephen laughs.

"Smartass."

"Right back at you," Stephen says, and tips his head to press a kiss to Loki's lips. Loki always, always kisses back. In love and in spite and in sweetness and in anger, he'll always claw his way to the back of Stephen's hair, and kiss with all the words he won't say.

Stephen pulls his ear. Loki bites his lip.

They fall in love more. Against every intuition, against every ounce of Stephen that says - *you shouldn't*.

Instead he says,

"You're beautiful."

Loki smiles against his lips. Threads their fingers, and whispers a spell into his tongue.

There's a part of Stephen that fears. That the next time Loki disappears, it might be his last. That one day he'll wake up with a knife in his back. But arms wrap around his neck, and a cold nose presses to his hair, and he knows, deep down, that Loki will always return.

"I love you too."

Chapter End Notes

Thanks guys :)

End Notes

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